

**'TRAVELLING HOPEFULLY': POSTMODERN THOUGHT AND THE  
FICTIONAL PRACTICE OF WALTER SCOTT, JAMES HOGG AND ROBERT  
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I declare that the work of which this thesis is a record was undertaken entirely by myself and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

Signed.

.....Date...8th May, 1991.....



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## Abstract

The postmodern context is one in which certain boundaries of the Scottish novel may be reassessed. Focusing upon reflexivity in language and the philosophical implications of it, postmodernism opens a space wherein the 'grand narrative' of English criticism and the totalising aesthetics it has valorized may be deconstructed. In doing so, it provides an environment in which the literary products of marginalised cultures may be positively re-examined. Likewise, post-structuralism provides a vocabulary in which the characteristic features of those marginalised literatures - the radical and subversive strategies which have shaped their challenge to the 'essence', 'presence', and so 'centre' - may be redefined.

This thesis offers a reading of selected nineteenth century Scottish fictions in such a postmodern context. Looking at the work of Walter Scott, James Hogg and Robert Louis Stevenson, it explores how far their work may benefit from such a reading. Examining their own exploration of the boundaries of fixed ontological positions, it notes how the inadequacy of these systems affects both their thematic concerns and their fictional strategies.

In Walter Scott's work, such exploration is found in his search for a model of Scottish identity, and a contingent deconstruction of fixed oppositional codes by which to describe it. In Hogg's fiction it results in a challenge to rigid epistemic systems and an exploration of the dangers and inadequacies of such totalising polarities. For Stevenson, it is embraced in a philosophy of 'travelling hopefully' and a literature - both fictional and critical - which attempts to find a path within this more multiplistic vision.

For all three writers it results in fictional practices and strategies which subvert

narrative totality and seek to create a more complex and indeterminate discourse.

Writing from the self deconstructing ground of Scottish experience, Scott, Hogg and Stevenson launch a challenge to all manifestations of 'grand narrative', deconstructing their boundaries. As a result, the postmodern context is one particularly sympathetic to their formal and structural radicalism.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis applies a critical framework developed from postmodern thinking and post-structuralist literary theory to selected nineteenth century Scottish fictions. The primary goal of the study is to examine the process of marginalisation which has debilitated critical awareness of, and responses to, these texts, this in order that they may be reassessed within a context sympathetic to their formal and structural radicalism.

The need for such study is apparent, for until recent years at least, the Scottish novel has been, as Isobel Murray and Bob Tait point out, overshadowed by English fiction:

Scottish fiction is still very much a poor relation of English fiction in the scale of critical attention it receives. Even the very best critical accounts, such as that of Francis Russell Hart in *The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey* (1978), tend to be just that: surveys, with little or no room for the considered attention to individual novels that is taken for granted in criticism of English fiction.<sup>1</sup>

There is a serious dearth of sensitive criticism of the Scottish novel, and that which does exist often finds little to say in the way of praise. On the contrary, Scottish fiction, when it is not ignored entirely, is repeatedly held up against its English counterpart and found lacking.

Clearly, such a process of critical marginalisation must be in some way remedied. However, I would dispute Murray and Tait's assertion that this can be achieved by 'considered attention to individual novels' alone, and argue that it may require more fundamental reassessment.<sup>2</sup> The surveys of Scottish literature which have so far appeared support such a claim, for they imply that some kind of alternative framework for Scottish literature may be necessary before more detailed criticism might take place.

The aim of this thesis, consequently, is to try to develop an alternative critical framework for certain aspects of Scottish fiction, and to apply it to three nineteenth century writers in order that hitherto neglected aspects of their work may be reassessed.<sup>3</sup> In order to do so, I have begun this study with an examination of both the process of marginalisation which appears to have hampered sympathetic criticism of Scottish fiction, and by assessing the suitability of a critical framework developed

from postmodern thought as a context in which it may be re-examined.

There may, of course, be other critical frameworks in which reassessment of the Scottish novel might take place. Attempts to provide such frameworks, such as those explored by Francis Russell Hart and Kurt Wittig in their surveys of Scottish literature, are valuable. Likewise, the recently published *History of Scottish Literature* provides a useful approach, gathering together in an eclectic fashion material which constitutes a Scottish 'canon'.<sup>4</sup> However, the postmodern context, which highlights the value of the ex-centric and marginal, seems to provide particularly rewarding strategies with which to approach Scottish fiction. The aim of this thesis is to examine how far this may be so.

Margaret Atwood, speaking of a need for reassessment in her own Canadian literature, itself often marginalised, suggests that a recognition of the separate status of a culture is itself insufficient, unless this recognition is accompanied by the simultaneous attempt to redraw the literary landscape along new criteria.<sup>5</sup> This thesis, it should be stated, does not attempt to provide a new map of the Scottish literary landscape, for any such map, which necessarily claims a homogeneity and unity amongst the entire body of Scottish fiction, is in the last analysis redundant. What it does aim to do is to reassess certain of its *boundaries*, and to attempt to find a framework in which these hitherto negated aspects of Scottish writing may be read in a new and more sympathetic context.

- 1 Isobel Murray and Bob Tait, *Ten Modern Scottish Novels* (Aberdeen, 1984), p.1.
- 2 This is not to undermine the value of Murray and Tait's study which offers an important contribution to criticism of the Scottish novel. However, as their work deals largely with twentieth century fiction it has been possible for them to overlook the complexities of studying the Scottish novel without some more radical framework for reassessment.
- 3 I do not by this selection wish to imply that these writers are in any way 'representative' of Scottish fiction. A far more ambiguous relationship exists between what may be defined as 'Scottish', and as 'marginal'.
- 4 Francis Russell Hart, *The Scottish Novel: A Critical Survey* (London, 1978).  
Kurt Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh and London, 1958).  
*The History of Scottish Literature*, 4 vols, edited by Cairns Craig (Aberdeen, 1987-1988).
- 5 Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto, 1972), p.19.



**CHAPTER 1:**  
**'THE UNTHINKABLE ITSELF': POSTMODERN RADICALISM AND THE**  
**SCOTTISH NOVEL**

The postmodern condition, Linda Hutcheon suggests, is one particularly sympathetic to the marginal and peripheral, or what she describes as the 'ex-centric':

The centre no longer completely holds. And from the decentered perspective, the 'marginal', and what I will be calling the 'ex-centric' (be it in class, race, gender, sexual orientation, or ethnicity) take on new signification in the light of the implied recognition that our culture is not really the homogeneous monolith (that is middle class, male, heterosexual, white, western) we might have assumed. The concept of alienated otherness (based on binary oppositions that conceal hierarchies) gives way, as I have argued, to that of differences, that is to the assertion, not of centralized sameness, but of decentralized community - another postmodern paradox.<sup>1</sup>

If Hutcheon's argument is correct, it clearly would suggest that postmodernism provides a sympathetic environment in which to reassess certain aspects of Scottish fiction. Before we can discuss the full value of this proposition, however, it is necessary to explore what Hutcheon here implies by both the 'postmodern', and the concept of the marginal or ex-centric.

The postmodern condition may be defined as the consequence of an increased awareness of the implications of reflexivity in language. While such an awareness has been implicit in philosophy from the classical period onwards, the twentieth century has certainly seen a pronounced awareness of the implications of this phenomenon. Beginning with the writings of Nietzsche, and reaching its most full expression to date in the project of deconstruction initiated by Jacques Derrida, the problem of reflexivity is one posed by the impossibility of finding a point beyond language from which language itself may be commented upon. This apparently simple recognition has far reaching philosophical implications, for it renders implausible, as Nietzsche concludes, the traditional philosophical project of the search for and definition of knowledge. Since 'knowledge' may never be defined beyond our interpretations of it in language, philosophy must move its site of interest towards other considerations, including whether the search for knowledge is a plausible aim. For Nietzsche, the conclusion was that it was not, since if 'facts' cannot exist beyond our constructions and interpretations of them in language, the notion of 'objective' or empirical

knowledge becomes meaningless:

In opposition to Positivism, which halts at phenomena and says, 'There are only *facts* and nothing more,' I would say: 'No, facts are precisely what is lacking, all that exists consists of *interpretations*. We cannot establish any fact in itself': it may even be nonsense to desire to do such a thing.<sup>2</sup>

Such reflexivity as Nietzsche is here expressing is one which in the twentieth century has gained increasing momentum. With Ferdinand de Saussure's assertion that the relationship between the sign and the signified - roughly speaking, the word and the object it describes - is an arbitrary one, and that communication must proceed by the less absolute methods of differential structuring, the notion of reflexivity and its implications have gained an importance central to any understanding of the postmodern condition.<sup>3</sup> As Hilary Lawson comments:

Reflexivity, as a turning back on oneself, a form of self-awareness, has been part of philosophy from its inception, but reflexive questions have been given their special force in consequence of the recognition of the central role played by language, theory, sign and text. Our concepts are no longer regarded as transparent - either in reflecting the world or conveying ideas. As a result all our claims about language and the world - and implicitly all our claims in general - are reflexive in a manner which cannot be avoided. For to recognise the importance of language is to do so within language. To argue that the character of the world is in part due to the concepts employed, is to employ those concepts. To insist that we are confined by the limitations of our own problematics is to be confined within those very limits.<sup>4</sup>

The philosophical implications then, of a recognition of reflexivity in language is what may be said to shape postmodernity. Such implications are, of course, those explored by Jacques Derrida.

Derrida's philosophical position may be described as post-structuralist, since its basic project is one of challenge to the totalising, binary systems assumed by classical thought and scrutinized by structuralist thinkers in the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> Such totalising, systems can, Derrida argues, be challenged precisely because of the reflexive nature of language, for they assume a point outside language, or beyond context, from which we may objectively comment upon the binary structures within it. Such structures he sees, consequently, as a falsification, and his

project of deconstruction is one which challenges and undermines their claims.

This is, of course, a simplification of Derrida's philosophical position which is complex and far reaching. Its main precepts are, however, based on a challenge to both traditional mimetic and structuralist approaches to language, and, by implication, certain philosophical assumptions. The traditional philosophical project, he suggests, has been a search for knowledge or for the 'transcendental signified', the 'centre' - or for structuralism 'essential structure' - beyond or under language. Like Nietzsche, however, he sees such a project as implausible, and the notion of such an 'ultimate referent' as a myth of philosophy. For Derrida language is perceived not as a glass - or even paradigm - through which we gain access to a totalising vision of the world, but, on the contrary, as a site of deferral where any such absolute meaning is repeatedly evaded and postponed. As such, the notion of centre, 'presence' or 'essence' is seen as a falsification, and the project of deconstruction one of dismantling those discourses and structures which appear to support it:

Henceforth, it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present - being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse - provided we can agree on this word - that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely.<sup>6</sup>

This process of deconstruction is plausible because the concept of centrality in language rests upon a system of polarity. The structuralist project, of course, supported such a framework, for it claimed that language operated by a series of binary oppositions, each term assuming meaning in relation to the other. Derrida, however, challenges this assumption, suggesting that meaning is, rather, generated through *différance*, through the 'free play of the signifier', and the relationship of one 'signifier' both to others, and to those which are absent or 'silenced':

Nevertheless, up to the event which I wish to mark out and define,

structure - or rather the structurality of structure - although it has always been at work, has always been neutralized or reduced, and this by a process of giving it a center or of referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin. The function of this center was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure - one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure - but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *play* of the structure. By orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form. And even today the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself.<sup>7</sup>

Words do not refer to the world with the structural 'rigidity' of binary opposition - which is merely a means of limiting 'play' - but by a system of 'slippage' between terms. Meaning becomes positioned, consequently, in a process of deferral, being at no point finally achieved; discourse, whether written or otherwise, recognised as a partial rather than a totalising enterprise.

Deconstruction is, consequently, a project which seeks to unsettle the nature of all discourse, allowing the gaps and slippages -the *otherness* - which exist within systems to be exposed by language itself. In so doing, it offers a critique to an entire body of western thought which has sought both to achieve total authority or 'presence' through the text, and to silence those voices which threaten to disrupt it. In particular, it is recognised as a critique of post-Enlightenment modernity, with its emphasis on empiricism and the unified subject.<sup>8</sup> All such discourses, the deconstructionists claim, are based on a false presumption of the ability of language to achieve presence, and may thus be 'shaken' or undermined, this being the basis of their project:

Derrida submits the violent, totalitarian structural project to the counterviolence of *solicitation*, which derives from the Latin *sollicitare*, meaning to shake the totality (from *sollus*, 'all', and *ciere*, 'to move, to shake'). Every totality, he shows, can be *totally shaken*, that is, can be shown to be founded on that which it excludes, that which would be in *excess* for a reductive analysis of any kind.<sup>9</sup>

The project of deconstruction, then, is one which seeks to reveal the semiological slippages, dislocations and elisions within all discourses and systems, including those of literature, in order that their apparent claim to be totalising or unified may be shaken. Furthermore, if all totalising structures - be they in politics, economics or

science - may be shown to be based on false notions of the 'centre', deconstruction would seem to challenge those world systems based on absolutes and supported by binary oppositions left largely intact since the Enlightenment. Such whole structures are based on misconception and may, in postmodern times, be abandoned.

In his study *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Jean-François Lyotard examines these cultural implications of postmodernity.<sup>10</sup> Lyotard identifies a challenge to concepts of totality both in philosophy and language with a rejection of ideas prevalent since the Enlightenment. Such a challenge is, he claims, to be welcomed, for it offers the possibility of a world model based on new and more flexible structures. After all, nostalgia for the 'whole', or for the 'centre' has, Lyotard points out, been the cause of much atrocity:

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience. Under the general demand for slackening and for appeasement we can hear the mutterings of the desire for a return to terror, for the realization of the desire to seize reality. The answer is: Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witness to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honour of the name.<sup>11</sup>

For Lyotard postmodernism and the ideas posited by post-structuralism are liberating ones, challenging oppressive structures and offering the opportunity for the 'differences' or hitherto silenced, 'absent' ex-centricities of perception and expression to be given their challenging voices.

Such an understanding of postmodernism and the ideas which inform it makes it clear why Linda Hutcheon should see it as a movement conducive to the margins, its challenge to totalising and excluding structures providing a radical context for political, social and cultural reassessment. However, such reassessment may be somewhat at odds with Derrida's own position, for he does not share Hutcheon's optimism.<sup>12</sup>

Earlier in *The Post-modern Condition*, Lyotard describes the panic felt by some towards the collapse of the totalising 'grand narratives':



This breaking up of the grand Narratives leads to what some authors analyze in terms of the dissolution of the social bond and the disintegration of social aggregates into a mass of individual atoms thrown into the absurdity of Brownian motion. Nothing of the kind is happening: this point of view, it seems to me, is haunted by the paradisaic representation of a lost 'organic' society.<sup>13</sup>

For some then, such as those Lyotard identifies, the model of language and society posited by deconstruction is a terrifying and anarchistic one, where the bonds which have traditionally held society together disintegrate into a destructive confusion.

To some extent, this may be seen as Derrida's own position, for it appears that his exploration of reflexivity leads him to entirely negative conclusions. 'The notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself', he writes, suggesting that world systems and models of thought based on his own post-structuralist conclusions are not tenable.<sup>14</sup> Such is Catherine Belsey's complaint against Derrida, for she suggests that, promising though his project may seem, it denies the possibility of any active political engagement, and consequently, of change:

But the opening pages of *Grammatology* invite vulgar deconstructionists to take it that there is no such thing as meaning, and in consequence, since meaningless language is literally unthinkable, that words mean whatever you want them to mean. This *Looking-Glass* reasoning leads at best to an anarchic scepticism, the celebration of undecidability as an end in itself, and at worst to the reinstatement of the mirror phase, where the critic-subject at play rejoices in its own linguistic plenitude. In the constant and repeated assertion of the evaporation of meaning there is no place to analyse the context for meaning, and therefore no politics, and there is no possibility of tracing changes of meaning, the sliding of the signified, in history.<sup>15</sup>

Belsey's doubts seem justified. For Derrida, the suggestion that language is a contained system implies a process of infinite regress whereby any attempt to test the validity of a discourse, must be thrown back on the assertion that language can only be assessed by other discourses or metatexts. The philosophical conclusion for Derrida - and Belsey's 'vulgar' deconstructionists - is, consequently, to see all human communications and relations as a process of 'free play' whereby all cultural systems

are regarded as false and arbitrary. Rendering reassessment impossible, such conclusions leave Derrida, as Charles Altieri puts it, 'trapped in an ironic or demonic version of the logic he wishes to deconstruct'.<sup>16</sup>

Such a position is dangerously close to the 'nostalgia of the whole and the one' condemned by Lyotard. To assume cultural contexts as simply arbitrary is also to assume some kind of fixed system from which they depart. Derrida is thus led towards a fear of disrupting this supposedly fixed system, describing his project of deconstruction as producing the birth of a 'nonspecies in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity'.<sup>17</sup> Such a fear of any real reassessment is also conspicuous in Derrida's methods. To regard writing as a system of deferral, endlessly approaching but never reaching the centre, is to retain a sense of the lost possibility of it; to be 'haunted by the paradisiac representation of a lost "organic" society' and, more importantly, to avoid the problem of how we are to proceed in a world once our totalising systems have been 'shaken'.

One should be wary, then of aligning Derrida too closely with cultural reassessment although it is clear that the ideas of post-structuralism itself imply the possibility of such an interpretation. If the postmodern context is to be used as a system for reassessing aspects of Scottish fiction a more flexible model is required - a model which both recognises a challenge to totalising structures and binary opposition, but also provides a framework within which social and linguistic exchange may proceed. Such a model is offered by the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein.

Like Derrida, Wittgenstein was absorbed with the problems of reflexivity. While the early *Tractatus* concerns itself with the traditional philosophical project of exploring a means by which to define knowledge, he abandoned this as implausible, devoting his later *Philosophical Investigations* to a description of meaning in a world where, because of linguistic reflexivity, no such definition is possible.<sup>18</sup> For Wittgenstein, the correct response to this problem is the rejection of any notion of absolute meaning in language, and the exploration instead of the ways in which



without it, communication functions and 'meaningfulness' proceeds. Meaning, he concludes, is an evolving of contexts, so that communication proceeds not by any absolute relationship between signifier and signified, word and object, but, on the contrary, by what he describes as 'grammar' - the relativistic relationship in context of a series of linguistic utterances. '*Essence* is expressed by grammar', he writes and suggests that this may be the only explanation of 'meaning':

For a *large* class of cases - though not for all - in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is in its use in the language.<sup>19</sup>

The result is that we find in Wittgenstein a far more social approach both to language and philosophy than that posited by Derrida. Working inductively, from the semiological 'givens' he observes in language and society, his movement away from any need to define meaning beyond language allows him to discover a method of procedure without such a totalising system. Charles Altieri elaborates:

The proposition that essence is expressed by grammar seeks to locate the possibility of philosophical certitude on a level of the surface purposes and actions that constitute ordinary experiences. Instead of pursuing deep structures underlying appearances, it tries to make us see the necessity within these appearances and to disabuse us of the desire, always leading to nostalgia and irony, of locating a true source of meaning beneath those we trust in ordinary activities.<sup>20</sup>

In any description of postmodernism Wittgenstein's position is important, for it suggests a method of absorbing post-structuralist concepts without becoming frozen into the reactionary nostalgia exhibited by Derrida and his followers. On the contrary, it allows a method of proceeding both in language and society by offering a metaphor for meaning in the form of 'game'; society may not be founded on the grand narratives and totalising structures held true in the past, but it does function, on rules and systems worked out between players in a given 'social' or 'grammatical' context. Such a proposition is, far more than Derrida's, liberating, for taking its position from a 'lived experience' of language, it both accepts the given systems as non-absolute ones and suggests that if the social context demands new boundaries, new 'rules' may be

established. 'And is there not also the case where we play and - make up the rules as we go along', he writes, 'and there is even one where we alter them - as we go along'.<sup>21</sup>

Wittgenstein's position is also important in considering literary postmodernism, for, as Charles Altieri points out, 'his basic discovery has been crucial to the spirit of post-modern literary thought, even if his particular solution has been largely ignored'.<sup>22</sup> This is not surprising, for while postmodernist writing may be a response to the implications of post-structuralism, any method of fictional writing requires a means of *proceeding*, thus following Wittgenstein's rather than Derrida's analogies. The alternative is a 'literature of exhaustion', the much proclaimed 'death of the novel'.<sup>23</sup> For those who wish to continue writing, an alternative position must be found within the postmodern context. The art of fictional writing, John Fowles suggests, involves the creation of '*worlds as real as, but other than the world that is*'.<sup>24</sup> Such a task, however, is clearly rendered problematic once the nature of that 'real' world has been destabilised and de-centred. To try to write in such an environment is, to some extent, to become frozen, for the writer is haunted by the realisation that the text he creates will be a false or dangerously misleading one. However, if, like Wittgenstein's model of language, the novel may be based on a game analogy with the world it creates revealed as only one context - and that fictional - the writer is again liberated to create 'worlds', but with an acknowledged awareness of their partial and non-totalising nature. Such a position is implied by the conclusion of what may be seen as a transitional modernist - postmodernist text, Samuel Beckett's *Trilogy*.<sup>25</sup>

Beckett's *Trilogy* exemplifies within itself the problematics of a response both literary and cultural to post-structuralism.<sup>26</sup> In its early parts, the *Trilogy* may be seen as an attempt to define knowledge and meaning, and as a result, is in accord with the modernist project, which was an attempt to locate the site of the 'transcendental signified' and record it within the text. For the modernists, meaning may have

changed its locus from the exterior to the interior, but their project remained, as Virginia Woolf emphasises, one of discovering and recording it.<sup>27</sup> However radical modernist experimentation may have been, it remained primarily concerned with questions of mimetic epistemology - questions of how 'meaning' and 'reality' could be best recorded within the text:

I will formulate it as a general thesis about modernist fiction: the dominant of modernist fiction is *epistemological*. That is, modernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions such as those mentioned by Dick Higgins in my epigraph: 'How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?' Other typical modernist questions might be added: What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it and with what degree of certainty?; How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another, and with what degree of reliability?; How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower?; What are the limits of the knowable? And so on.<sup>28</sup>

The attempt to answer such questions was to lead the modernists to potentially sterile conclusions, as the move inwards in search of meaning led, in Beckett's *Trilogy* at least, to a disembodied voice, totally remote from lived experience.

In the *Trilogy*, however, Beckett's response is to abandon such a search for presence, for the Unnamable discovers that it is only within the 'stories' he constructs for himself, that meaning may be located. The conclusion of the *Trilogy* may be read consequently as a turning away from this 'epistemological dominant' towards an exploration and acceptance of linguistic game-strategies as the site of interest:

I can't go on, you must go on, I'll go on, you must say words, as long as there are any, until they find me, until they say me, strange pain, strange sin, you must go on, perhaps it's done already, perhaps they have said me already, perhaps they have carried me to the threshold of my story, before the door that opens on my story, that would surprise me, if it opens, it will be I, it will be the silence, where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on.<sup>29</sup>

This side step away from nihilism marks the transition of the *Trilogy* from modernism into postmodernism, for it rejects the search for presence and focuses instead on constructions of it in language. In doing so, it mirrors Wittgenstein's own

development, searching first for the site of meaning, and finally abandoning it for a recognition of the ways in which it is posited only within, rather than behind or beyond, language. By thus positioning meaning only within flexible linguistic game-strategies it is typical of postmodernist fiction. Like Beckett, writers like B.S.Johnson, Alasdair Gray and Umberto Eco have chosen to explore, by a variety of narrative strategies, the non-totalising nature of their texts, while suggesting, nevertheless, that their writing may have value within the given fictional context.<sup>30</sup> Such writing thus unsettles any absolutist or total model of both itself and of human experience by constantly questioning its own ontological position:

The dominant of postmodern fiction is *ontological*. That is, postmodernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions like the ones Dick Higgins calls 'post-cognitive': 'Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?' Other typical postmodernist questions bear either on the ontology of the literary text itself or on the ontology of the world which it projects, for instance: What is a world?; What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?; What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?; What is the mode of existence of a text, and what is the mode of existence of the world (or worlds) it projects?; How is a projected world structured. And so on.<sup>31</sup>

While such an approach certainly questions the ontological status of the text, it also clearly explores ways in which the text, society, and the individual can proceed in a world beyond ontological certainty.

Postmodernism, then, as a philosophical, cultural and literary movement, seems to follow a Wittgensteinian rather than a Derridean trajectory. For both society and the fictional writer must, if they are to continue, find, like Wittgenstein, a method to proceed in the face of the loss of ontological certainties which post-structuralism instigates. To do so is, as R.L Stevenson describes it in his essay 'El Dorado', to 'travel hopefully' - to acknowledge that there may be no final destination, that the centre may 'have no natural site', but nevertheless to continue.<sup>32</sup>

Postmodernism may then be regarded not as a movement of terror and predicament,

but as one of potential liberation. If we follow Wittgenstein's conclusions, the acknowledgement that meaning may evolve within socially agreed and flexible structures allows for reassessment and redefinition. Moreover, such reassessment may prove sympathetic to the margins, those ex-centric groups previously silenced by the need of the centre to position them in relation to itself. With that centre de-centred and destabilised, however, the context inhabited by the margins may be seen as non-absolute and consequently open to reassessment.

Wittgenstein was himself aware of the possible cultural implications of his own philosophical conclusions. Evolving a theory of the peripheries, Wittgenstein proposed that once language and society are defined as 'gramatically created', it is no longer possible simply to impose the game-rules of one culture upon another.<sup>33</sup> In so doing, he launched a challenge against the structuralist project by suggesting that their attempt to find what is common to all cultures necessitated the imposition of their own grammars - or systems of interpretation - upon that which they were examining. 'Grammar', he suggests, is worked out in context, and as such, cannot be transported whole-sale from one culture to another:

A coronation is the picture of pomp and dignity. Cut one minute of this proceeding out of its surroundings: the crown is beng placed on the head of the king in his coronation robes. - But in different surroundings gold is the cheapest of metals, its gleam is thought vulgar. There the fabric of the robe is cheap to produce. A crown is thought the parody of a respectable hat. And so on.<sup>34</sup>

It was, he concluded, inadequate to study any culture from 'outside' in this manner, and proposed that the 'peripheries' might be fully apprehended only within their own social contexts. For the peripheries, consequently, the loss of grand-absolutes and totalising structures is not tragic, but offers a radical context for reassessment.

In the field of literary criticism, Wittgenstein's conclusions lend credence to Attwood's proposal that reassessment of a marginalised literature requires a new map of its own literary context.<sup>35</sup> Such a claim raises new and complex questions, for it requires that we somehow define the boundaries and game-rules upon which we are

to build this new and alternative framework. While postmodernism may challenge the totality and validity of previously held systems and provide the general environment in which reassessment of Scottish fiction might take place, clearly a set of 'game-rules' sympathetic to the Scottish novel must also be developed.

Yet the question of how these 'game-rules' for the Scottish novel are to be developed is problematic. As yet, little has been done to establish Scottish literature as marginalised, far less to provide a critical context in which it might be re-examined. This is not the case, however, for another group identified by Linda Hutcheon as 'ex-centric' - women and women's writing. Consequently, though it may seem something of a diversion to the main topic of this thesis, it is helpful to examine the steps taken by certain modes of feminist literary criticism in their attempts to find a sympathetic framework for women's literature.<sup>36</sup> By doing so useful analogies emerge for the Scottish situation.

Elaine Showalter argues that there are three stages in the development of women's writing. These stages are, she claims, common to the development of all literary subcultures:

First there is a prolonged phase of *imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and *internalization* of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of *protest* against these standards and values, and *advocacy* of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally there is a phase of *self-discovery*, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. An appropriate terminology for women writers is to call these stages, *Feminine*, *Feminist*, and *Female*.<sup>37</sup>

These stages can be seen to be mirrored in the development of feminist literary criticism, with the first stage incorporating the 'equal rights' phase of feminism, the second involving the pioneering work by the Feminist Press and Virago, accompanied by pressure from early feminist critics to establish a body and 'canon' of women's literature, and the third at present underway in establishing what is possibly unique and distinctive in women's writing.



As Showalter's argument would suggest, a similar three stage process can be identified in the criticism of Scottish literature. The first stage she defines as that of imitation and internalization. Within this phase, the marginalised group will attempt to measure its own productions against those values promoted by the core and central culture. Such a process may be found in the study of Scottish fiction, for repeatedly it is held up against its English counterpart. This process, however, is not always productive, for placing aspects of the Scottish novel within such a context has resulted in a type of criticism which frequently sees it only in terms of negatives. Ian Campbell, in his study *Kailyard*, exemplifies the type of criticism which may result in this phase of 'imitation':

As the century progressed, the contrast between some Scottish fiction and some English becomes marked; Scotland lacks the subtle exploration of local life in *Silas Marner*, *Adam Bede*, above all in *Middlemarch*.; Scotland has no *Wuthering Heights*; the Scottish cities do not find in an author of the stature of Dickens an analyst who can relate the themes of his novels to the complexity of an evolving industrial civilisation in the here and now of his times.<sup>38</sup>

Here, the Scottish novel is described only in terms of what it has failed to achieve - in terms of the absences which are bound to emerge when Scottish fiction is studied in a framework developed for an English context.

The second phase described by Showalter is that of protest against these standards, and advocacy of minor rights and values. This phase too, is one experienced by criticism of Scottish fiction. This phase involves a recognition of one's separate culture, and however much this may be resisted, a recognition of its marginalisation. Just as in the case of feminist criticism this has involved the establishment of an alternative 'canon' of women's literature, so too this pattern can be seen in Scottish criticism, with the establishment of separate Scottish literature courses in schools and universities, and the appearance of those surveys of Scottish literature identified by Murray and Tait.<sup>39</sup> This phase is clearly important, for it provides a context of material and a recognition of one's cultural achievements out of which a more full reassessment may develop. So too, this phase involves a recognition of the hitherto

marginalised nature of the culture, in order that the need for reassessment may be recognised. Important in this stage of Scottish criticism has been Cairns Craig's article 'Peripheries'.<sup>40</sup>

Craig's 'Peripheries' which appeared in *Cencrastus* in 1982 is important, for it identifies a process by which criticism of Scottish literature has been debilitated. Such 'marginalisation' is, he suggests, part of a more general dynamic by which core cultures retain dominance, and the peripheries remain marginalised. The dominant nature of the central culture, and its wish to retain this position, Craig argues, leads it to construct a view of itself as an organic and evolving necessity. Such a critical model - and he cites F.R. Leavis's *The Great Tradition* as an example - can only be established at the expense of the periphery. In order to support this model, the core must absorb all those aspects of its margins which support the critical model it has chosen for itself, while dismissing as unsuccessful any work which suggests too great a degree of disruption and diversity. The culture of the periphery is, consequently, plundered to suggest the 'wholeness' of the core, and that which remains inevitably consists of productions which fail to conform to the centre's chosen terms of critical appraisal:

Core cultures operate by taking to themselves all significant achievements in the periphery that can be accommodated without too great a stress. The judgment that the periphery represents an impoverished and impoverishing tradition is therefore made inevitable.<sup>41</sup>

A second stage of this process, Craig continues, involves the periphery itself and can be largely aligned with the stage of imitation identified by Showalter. Rather than questioning the model which the core culture offers, the periphery accepts it as the only one available and attempts to fit its cultural achievements into this framework. However, since those achievements are generally those which have already been discarded by the core culture, the periphery finds itself repeatedly deficient, thus reinforcing its peripheral, and second rate, position:



To live on the periphery of a major culture or on the periphery of Europe is almost inevitably to be parochial. And the consequence is self-hatred. It is not our personal self that we hate, but that self when seen moulded by the group: to escape the parochial we borrow the eyes of the dominant culture - for the parochial does not exist till there is both an 'us' and an 'other' - and through those eyes we see how close that parochial group-self stands to us - Hyde behind Jekyll - ready to claim our personally created self again.<sup>42</sup>

By this two stage process, Craig concludes, criticism of Scottish literature has been debilitated, for it hardly provides a healthy or productive environment for criticism. Both that literature absorbed by the core and that rejected by it is seen in a distorted context. In the case of Scottish literature, the results are disastrous, leading on the one hand to 'that most famous of Scottish literary parlour games' - the search for and lamentation of reasons for Scottish literature's failure - or, on the other, to 'the couthy warmness that unites people in defiance of the outside world', which has produced a narrow and sentimental definition of Scottish literature as that which overtly deals with Scottish experience and themes.<sup>43</sup> Both prevent productive criticism of Scottish literature in its own terms, and any real evaluation of what may be of value in it.

Cairns Craig concludes 'Peripheries', however, with a call for reassessment:

Recognising the vitality of the periphery is the first step towards overthrowing the dominant conceptions of tradition; overthrowing those traditions will release the vitality of the periphery.<sup>44</sup>

Such a task, he claims, involves the recognition that there may be alternative ways of reading - alternative contexts - to those which see Scottish and Irish writing as 'botched' versions of English fiction. In so doing, Craig is clearing the way for the third phase of Showalter's three stage process, whereby the marginalised group searches for its own literary identity and establishes a context for itself free from its dominant neighbour.

Little as yet has been done to provide this alternative context or grammar for Scottish fiction. It is, however, hardly surprising, for it is this third phase which is the most challenging and which has also proved the most problematic for feminist criticism. The problematics of this phase are two-fold, for on the one hand it seems to

demand that while caught within a dominant ideology we reassess ourselves from a position beyond it, and perhaps even more challenging, we evolve a theory of what it is to be Scottish or female in a way never demanded of the dominant group. Such a demand seems to imply that we come with completely open and unbiased minds to the body of Scottish literature and read through it systematically in order that we might assess what is characteristic in it, learning a new set of game-rules as we do so.<sup>45</sup> Such a task is clearly an impossibility, for we cannot escape our own context - significantly shaped by English criticism - in order to adopt it, and we suspect that even if it were practical the results would show no straightforward pattern of critical criteria. How then, are we to develop any kind of critical framework within which to examine Scottish fiction?

Again, it is helpful to examine the arguably analogous rhetoric of examination employed by feminist criticism based as it is on the attempt to establish what is distinctive and unique about its own ex-centricity. This search has led to many strange constructions of femininity, not all of them entirely helpful in terms of practical feminism, since they establish models of the feminine often apparently at odds with society and what they admit as its patriarchal structures. Such theoretical feminists are therefore caught in a trap similar to that which binds Derrida - admitting that society is based on a 'false' patriarchal structure, but unwilling to change it lest they soil their hands with the tools of patriarchy. They may, consequently, evolve highly intellectual theories of femininity, while doing nothing to challenge the economic, political and sexual subjugation of women.

Nevertheless, some of the theories of women's writing - or *écriture féminine* as Hélène Cixous specifically defines it - which they have evolved may still be helpful regarding Scottish fictional ex-centricity, for they serve to pinpoint those aspects of writing which have been historically and culturally marginalised.<sup>46</sup> I will concentrate here on Hélène Cixous' own analysis, for it seems to offer the most highly evolved and coherent argument and one which is consistent with my thesis. Clearly following a Derridean line of thought, Cixous identifies patriarchal discourse as being based

upon a series of binary oppositions which, she claims, operate to maintain a masculine and phallogentric system. Within such a system the negative or silenced side - including such aspects as emotion, nature, and passivity - is always that which may be aligned with the feminine:

*Where is she?*

Activity/passivity,  
Sun/Moon,  
Culture/Nature,  
Day/Night,<sup>47</sup>

Such binary oppositions, Cixous argues, are in endless confrontation, battling so that one may acquire meaning over the other, with the 'feminine' aspect being repeatedly negated or defeated. Her theoretical project as Toril Moi describes it is, consequently, a systematic challenge to this method of thought:

Her whole theoretical project can in one sense be summed up as the effort to undo this logocentric ideology: to proclaim woman as the source of life, power and energy and to hail the advent of a new, feminine language that ceaselessly subverts these patriarchal binary schemes where logocentrism colludes with phallogentrism in an effort to oppress and silence women.<sup>48</sup>

In order to do so, Cixous proposes that women's writing may be described as that which incorporates Derrida's concept of '*différance*' within it, so that it intrinsically challenges the totality of masculine discourse. *Écriture féminine*, consequently, is described as writing which challenges homogeneity, disrupts binary oppositions, and revels in *différance* in its resistance to closure.

If Cixous' concept of *écriture féminine* is accepted it is not hard to see why Catherine Belsey should suggest that the postmodern condition is one particularly sympathetic to feminist criticism and women's writing.<sup>49</sup> Nor if, as Elaine Showalter suggests, the experiences of women's writing may be extended to all subculture literary experience, why it should be a phenomenon conducive to the reassessment of all marginal and ex-centric groups. Within such a model, it is even less difficult to see how Scottish literature, likewise, can emerge as '*écriture*' which launches an attack on

totality and the dominance of the centre.

Yet there are manifest problems in Cixous' easy equation between *écriture féminine* and writing which itself 'shakes the totality'. Such writing, Cixous suggests, may not necessarily be deemed feminine by virtue of the sexual gender of the author, but may paradoxically also be produced by men. While such a paradox seems to challenge the entire notion of *écriture féminine*, Cixous' next step is, nevertheless, to develop a theory of femininity by which to account for the phenomenon. Like that of her sister theoretician Luce Irigaray, Cixous' analysis relies heavily on psychoanalytical interpretation, for it is, they conclude, by virtue of women's earliest symbiotic experiences, and by the manner in which the symbiotic bond is broken, that they retain access to an unstructured and mystical arena of thought usually unavailable to men.<sup>50</sup> Such an arena, commonly labelled the 'semiotic' resists closure into a phallogentric order of discourse.

Apart from the very obvious fact that this theory seems undermined by the notion that *écriture féminine* may be the product of men, such a theory renders problematic the position of women like George Eliot and Jane Austen who seem to escape their gender programming to write in forms acceptable to the patriarchal system. Even more worryingly, the association of *écriture féminine* with the constant need to find reasons in the female experience to account for it seems to suggest a dangerously homogeneous notion of women's writing. If applied to Scottish literature such a model does not seem that far removed from the 'cosy parlour game' of Scottish self-examination which Cairns Craig so aptly describes.

However promising a theory Cixous' seems, then, any notion that feminist criticism may provide a critical context for Scottish fiction by identifying a form of writing which itself 'works on the difference' as essentially female or Scottish seems to pose problems, for it does little to actually challenge the status quo, and leaves us with the need somehow to account for the fact that Scottish literature, like women's, may appear to universally adopt different methods from its English counterpart. My reasons for outlining these theories of *écriture féminine* lie, however, in the fact that in

spite of the final inadequacies of Cixous proposals, her interpretation does serve to indicate those aspects of literature which have in the past been silenced. While these elements of writing - the 'semiotic' and disruptive elements in it - may not be accounted for by any theory of femininity, they are clearly aspects which have been negated by the traditional critical context. Julia Kristeva, building on these theories of *écriture féminine*, provides a way out of this impasse, by suggesting that in order to account for these aspects of literature, one might do well to look not at theories of femininity, but of marginalisation.<sup>51</sup>

Kristeva's analysis is particularly useful for this thesis. Rather than identifying the semiotic aspect in writing with femininity *per se*, she identifies it with what has been marginalised in western culture. Rather than attempting to define what it is in the feminine that leads women to write in a form which challenges phallocentrism, she proposes a far more flexible model, suggesting that that which is marginalised may be equated with that which challenges totality. Like Wittgenstein's, consequently, hers is a theory of contexts, and one which being non-essentialist, both allows for the possibility of change, and helps to account for literary productions by both men and women which seem to burst free of their gender based frameworks.

Kristeva, rather than proposing a theory of *écriture féminine* describes a concept of radical writing or revolutionary literature. Revealing her psychoanalytical origins, Kristeva describes such literature as that which allows the 'semiotic' to break through into the text.<sup>52</sup> By so doing, it produces ruptures, gaps and breaks, 'shaking the totality' both in structure and - as will become important in discussing the chosen writers in this thesis - also in theme.

Kristeva's non-essentialist analysis therefore helpfully draws a connection not between 'radical' writing and the feminine or any other aspect of the ex-centric, but on the contrary finds a connection between radical writing and that which in a variety of historical, economic and political contexts may have been marginalised. Such an analysis seems to remove both the need to endlessly discuss the *reasons* for the

ex-centric group's 'failure' to produce 'phallogentric' or totalising literature, and to find a way out of the somewhat ridiculous situation where writers like James Joyce are deemed 'feminine'.

Kristeva's thesis, then, proposes not a total alignment between literature of the so-called marginalised group and a non-total, subversive form of writing, but suggests that those voices which have been silenced are precisely those which, not surprisingly, are 'in excess' of a total system, in that they themselves 'shake the totality'. Such a model is clearly helpful not only in discussing women's writing, but all literature of the margins. For Kristeva, marginalised writing may be equated with that which launches an attack on totality. For the purposes of providing a context for criticism of the Scottish novel then, such a theory suggests that while not *all* Scottish writing will be of a form which challenges absolutism, that which has been historically negated or rejected by the dominant culture will be that which at a thematic and a structural level challenges absolute systems, shakes the totality or, to use Cixous' expression, 'works on the difference'. Within such a framework, postmodernism clearly provides a suitable context in which to reassess aspects of the ex-centric, for itself offering a challenge to totalising systems and binary oppositions, it provides a 'grammar' sympathetic to such literature.

Here then we seem to find a possible critical context in which to examine certain problematic and hitherto marginalised aspects of Scottish fiction for it emerges that that which has been marginalised may be described as that which itself challenges total and binary systems. Such a model is also supported if we look in more detail at the criteria upon which the dominant canon has been established. For the purposes of argument this criteria can be taken as represented by F.R. Leavis's seminal study *The Great Tradition*.<sup>53</sup>

In 'Peripheries' Cairns Craig describes the way in which Leavis absorbs elements of peripheral cultures - Joseph Conrad and Henry James for example - in order to establish a unified and apparently homogeneous model of 'English' literature. This is



not surprising, for such unified and totalising models are ones, Lyotard suggests, favoured by the centre or dominant culture in its attempt to retain power. Similarly, the critical criterion adopted by Leavis in *The Great Tradition* is one which favours resolution, empiricism and fixed moral standards, apparently reinforcing, rather than shaking, the notion of totality. It is consequently, as Catherine Belsey points out, by the absorption of such standards that the dominant culture produces a set of criteria which offer it an inevitable right to retain its dominant position:

Trained in the kind of discrimination demonstrated in *The Great Tradition*, the leaders of the community are to be properly equipped to recognise a hierarchy of subjectivity, mysteriously given to individuals, and judged on the basis of a knowledge not open to rational argument. By this means, a ruling elite provides itself with a sensibility which is the source and guarantee of its right to control and administer experience.<sup>54</sup>

This process can be discerned by examining the criteria which Leavis proposes as significant for the major novel. His first criterion is concerned with its formal construction. Not surprisingly, his favoured mode is realism, the least subversive, but as Roland Barthes suggests, the most deceptive of narrative modes. Realism, Barthes argues, is like all other forms, highly rhetorical and stylized. Its danger, however, lies in the fact that it attempts to paper over this artificiality, tricking the reader into the belief that the world it presents is an absolute one, reflecting precisely that of lived experience:

This writing, which is that of Maupassant, Zola and Daudet and which could be called the realist mode of writing, is a combination of the formal signs of Literature (preterite, indirect speech, the rhythm of written language) and of the no less formal signs of realism (incongruous snippets of popular speech, strong language or dialect words, etc.), so that no mode of writing was more artificial than that which set out to give the most accurate description of Nature. This is no mere stylistic failure but one of theory as well: there is, in the Naturalist aesthetic, a convention of the real, just as there is a fabrication in its writing. The paradox is that the abasement of subjects has not in the least entailed the unobtrusiveness of form. Neutral writing is a late phenomenon to be invented much later than Realism by authors like Camus, less under the impulse of an aesthetics of escape than in the search of a mode of writing which might at last achieve innocence. The writing of Realism is far from being neutral, it is on the contrary loaded with the most spectacular signs of fabrication.<sup>55</sup>

As a narrative mode realism, based as it is on an empirical and singular notion of 'reality' as an unambiguous concept, seems to confirm the core's own vision of itself as absolute. More pluralistic modes, however, such as romance, are threatening to this totalising vision and are, consequently, dismissed by Leavis from his aesthetic framework. Walter Scott is dismissed from Leavis's 'canon of the great' precisely on this basis, for his adherence to what Leavis describes unproblematically as 'romance' flaws his talent as, he suggests, it will also mar Stevenson's:

He was a great and very intelligent man; but, not having the creative writer's interest in literature, he made no serious attempt to work out his own form and break away from the bad tradition of the eighteenth-century romance. Of his books, *The Heart of Midlothian* comes the nearest to being a great novel, but hardly is that: too many allowances and deductions have to be made. Out of Scott a bad tradition came. It spoiled Fenimore Cooper, who had new and first hand interests and the makings of a distinguished novelist. And with Stevenson it took on 'literary' sophistication and fine writing.<sup>56</sup>

The desire for a totalising form of writing which this reveals is also found in Leavis's second criterion for the great novel. The great novelists, he suggests, all share a 'marked moral intensity'. While it is hard to discern precisely what he means by this principle, it becomes clear in the discussion of his chosen authors that it involves the dramatisation of moral issues and their resolution into the unity of accepted standards. He describes these standards as those of 'high civilisation', and suggests that it was the demise of them in America which caused Henry James's flight to England. Whatever these standards might be, Leavis suggests that they are absolute and undebatable ones, not, as Wittgenstein might suggest, ones bound by their social context and appropriate only in a given historical, social and economic situation. Such is evident in a comment made by Leavis following David Cecil's critique of George Eliot:

'And her standards of right and wrong were the Puritan standards. She admired truthfulness and chastity and industry and self-restraint, she disapproved of loose living and recklessness and deceit and self-indulgence.' I had better confess that I differ (apparently) from



Lord David Cecil in sharing these beliefs, admirations and disapprovals, so that the reader knows my bias at once.<sup>57</sup> And they seem to me favourable to the production of great literature.

The question of whether or not Leavis shares these standards, however, is not at odds. What is revealing here is that for him, 'right' and 'wrong' are unshakeable and unproblematic entities. By demanding that 'great' literature reinforces rather than questions these qualities as absolute rather than context bound is again to require a totalising system in the novel. Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is, consequently, undermined by virtue of this principle, and so too, it is clear, must be all fiction which fails to resolve the issues it raises into an absolute binary framework but suggests, rather, the slippage between these polarities.

It is hardly surprising then that Leavis's third criterion for the novel should be a demand for the unity and totality of its thematic and structural components. Diversity, ambiguity, experimentation, are features which challenge an absolute model, and just as Leavis is unwilling to admit such variations into his tradition as a whole, he is reluctant to condone them in the 'great' novel. The 'lack of a unifying and organising structure' is the ground upon which he omits Dickens, and, similarly, James Joyce:

But it seems plain to me that there is no organic principle determining, informing, and controlling into a vital whole, the elaborate analogical structure, the extraordinary variety of technical devices, the attempts at an exhaustive rendering of consciousness, for which *Ulysses* is remarkable, and which got it accepted by a cosmopolitan literary world as a new start. It is, rather, I think, a dead end, or at least a pointer to disintegration - a view strengthened by Joyce's own development.<sup>58</sup>

What seems to emerge from an analysis of *The Great Tradition*, then, is that Leavis's criterion for the great novel is one which supports absolutist values and totalising structures.<sup>59</sup> Those novels displaying features which challenge such systems and in any way 'shake the totality' are consequently as Kristeva's analysis suggests, silenced, dismissed from the great tradition, and expelled from the canon.

*The Great Tradition*, however, could not alone have resulted in the marginalisation of those novels which challenge totality if it had not, as Catherine Belsey suggests,

been symptomatic of a deep rooted critical discourse:

There is a sense in which the great tradition of the English novel - the fiction which is unquestionably 'Literature', and which belongs unmistakably on the syllabus - was produced by F.R. Leavis in *The Great Tradition*. Not single-handed, of course. Leavis did not bring any of his 'great English novelists' for the first time before an unsuspecting public. But his critical 'discriminations' established a literary topography which authoritatively distinguished between what was major and minor, mature and infantile in the field of fiction. These judgements, with some small adjustments, have permeated a whole literary culture and a national educational system, and have produced a high degree of consensus concerning the criteria of greatness in literature and the characteristics of novels which are recognised as worth reading. In identifying such novels, Leavis constructed the great tradition itself, made its greatness and its continuity palpable, put it 'plainly', as he himself might have said, 'there'.<sup>60</sup>

As a consequence, it would seem, the dominant literature emerges as that which apparently supports totalising systems, while that which has been marginalised may be equated with a form of writing which overtly disrupts them. The silenced voices of Scottish literature therefore emerge as those which disrupt totality and question binary systems, those radical features which Derrida suggests are 'in excess' of any total system.

The postmodern context, however, and the post-structuralist ideas which it incorporates, clearly provide an environment within which such a topography can be reassessed. Not only does the postmodern context provide an environment in which reassessment of the margins is possible, it likewise provides a grammar sympathetic to its formal and structural radicalism. Post-structuralism both provides a vocabulary and a critical context within which these silenced, radical voices may be allowed expression, and offers a framework sympathetic to the non-totalising elements within it. It is, consequently, my intention here to examine these silenced aspects of the Scottish novel within this context wherein the vitality of these radical features may be released, and their value in fiction re-examined.

I have, for this purpose, taken three nineteenth-century Scottish novelists whose work seems particularly receptive to study within this alternative context. While those

chosen - Walter Scott, James Hogg and Robert Louis Stevenson - cannot be said to have been entirely neglected, critical appreciation of their work has certainly been hampered by the demands for unity and wholeness which Leavis incorporates. Their relationship with criticism has been an uneasy one, swithering between a recognition that their work may be in some way valuable, and a reluctance to admit it wholeheartedly into the canon.<sup>61</sup> Such a problematic position results precisely from the challenge to totality and the exploration of binary systems of thought which are to be found in their writing. Postmodernism provides a context where such features may be both vocalised and valued and it is my intention to examine the work of these writers in this framework.

It should be stated, however, that the purpose of this thesis is not to suggest that these writers can be defined as 'postmodernist', as such a category would clearly be both anachronistic and misleading. Nor is it to suggest that Scott, Hogg and Stevenson challenge totalising systems or binary oppositions with the degree of self-consciousness exhibited by postmodernist writers of fiction. On the contrary, the challenge to absolutism and polarised frameworks which we meet in their work arises more often from the need to respond to the social, religious and political situation around them; from a need to write from their own context, itself often an ambiguous one. Nevertheless, such a desire has led to a fascinating and important critique of binary oppositions and total systems within their work, and it is precisely these elements which may benefit from critical reassessment.

The fundamental aim of this thesis, therefore, is to reassess the fictional practice of three Scottish writers in a context sympathetic to their formal and structural radicalism, though not to suggest that these writers, and the critical rhetoric applied to them, are in any way representative of the entire body of Scottish literature. Scottish writing 'inhabits' many diverse styles and voices, including those promoted by Leavis. The purpose of this study is only to reassert those aspects of Scottish writing which have been hitherto silenced - those formal and thematic strategies which 'shake the totality'

and meet an awareness of the multiplistic and ambiguous nature of experience in the spirit, to use Stevenson's phrase, of 'travelling hopefully'.

- 1 Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory Fiction* (New York and London, 1988), p.12.
- 2 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power: An Attempted Transvaluation of all Values*, translated by Anthony M. Ludovici, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, edited by Oscar Levy, 18 vols (Edinburgh and London, 1909-1910), XV (1810), sec.481, p.12.
- 3 Saussurean linguistics have had an important effect on the question of reflexivity. For a good introduction to his work see those essays reprinted in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, edited by David Lodge (London, 1988), pp.1-14. For more detailed information see Jonathan Culler, *Saussure* (Sussex, 1976).
- 4 Hilary Lawson, *Reflexivity: The Post-modern Predicament* (London, 1985), p.9. Lawson's study offers a good insight into the relationship between postmodernism and reflexivity.
- 5 Such a position is also implied by the circumstances under which Derrida's famous lecture 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' was first given. Offered at a conference on Structuralism in 1966, the lecture challenged the basic assumptions of that methodology. This lecture is reprinted in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (London, 1978), pp.278-293.
- 6 Derrida, p.280.
- 7 Derrida, p.278/279.
- 8 I am in some ways wary of this description of Enlightenment thought which seems to define it in rather simplistic terms. There were, of course, elements in the Enlightenment itself which challenged these premises, in particular embodied in David Hume and the Sceptics. For a description of this aspect of the Enlightenment as it existed in Scotland, see John MacQueen, *The Rise of the Historical Novel, The Enlightenment and Scottish Literature*, 2 (Edinburgh, 1989).
- 9 Alan Bass, 'Introduction', *Writing and Difference*, pp.ix-xx (p.xvi).
- 10 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, Theory and History of Literature*, 10, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester, 1984).
- 11 Lyotard, p.81/82.
- 12 One should always be wary of aligning Derrida too closely with postmodernism. While his ideas may be central to postmodern thought, it is less because he has shaped postmodernism, than because he has brought together a set of philosophical ideas which collectively shape the postmodern condition.
- 13 Lyotard, p.15.
- 14 Derrida, p.279.
- 15 Catherine Belsey, 'Literature, History, Politics', reprinted in *Modern Criticism*

and Theory: A Reader, pp.399-410 (p.403).

- 16 Charles Altieri, 'Wittgenstein on Consciousness and Language: A Challenge to Derridean Literary Theory', *Modern Language Notes* 91(1976), pp.1397-1423, (p.1398).
- 17 Derrida, p.293.
- 18 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London, 1922).  
Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford, 1953).  
For an excellent comparison of the relationship between Derrida and Wittgenstein see Henry Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida* (London, 1984).
- 19 *Philosophical Investigations*, sec.371, p.116.  
*Philosophical Investigations*, sec.43, p.20.
- 20 Altieri, p.1413.
- 21 *Philosophical Investigations*, sec.83, p.39.
- 22 Altieri, p.1411.
- 23 These phrases are coined by John Barth. See 'A Literature of Exhaustion', in *The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction*, edited by Malcolm Bradbury (Manchester, 1977), pp.70-83.
- 24 John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (London, 1969), p.98.
- 25 Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable* (London, 1959).
- 26 To state as much is of course something of an anachronism, for the completion of the *Trilogy* predates Derrida's famous lecture. However, such a situation confirms the statement that Derrida only brings together a collection of ideas which may be said to constitute the postmodern condition.
- 27 Virginia Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', *Collected Essays*, 4 vols (London, 1966-67), I (1966), pp.319-337.  
There is of course no attempt to describe here the full complexities of modernist dynamics.
- 28 Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London, 1987), p.9.
- 29 Beckett, p.418.
- 30 It is impossible to describe the postmodern novel in any comprehensive way within the context of this thesis. Brian McHale's study, however, offers an excellent introduction.
- 31 Brian McHale, p.10.
- 32 R.L. Stevenson, 'El Dorado', *Virginibus Puerisque*, Skerryvore Edition, XXII, pp.95 -98.  
I will deal with this essay in more detail in Chapter 4 which deals specifically with Stevenson's work.
- 33 For a full discussion of this aspect of Wittgenstein's work see Bryan Magee, *Men of Ideas: Some Creators of Contemporary Philosophy* (London, 1978).



- 34 *Philosophical Investigations*, p.153.
- 35 See Introduction to this thesis, p.2.
- 36 For a full discussion of feminist criticism in all its manifestations see Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London, 1985).
- 37 Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (Princeton N.J., 1977), p.13.
- 38 Ian Campbell, *Kailyard* (Edinburgh, 1981), pp.115/116.
- 39 See Introduction to this thesis p.1.
- 40 Cairns Craig, 'Peripheries', *Cencrastus*, no.9 (Summer, 1982), pp.3-9.
- 41 'Peripheries', p.5.
- 42 'Peripheries', p.3.
- 43 'Peripheries', pp.3-4.
- 44 'Peripheries', p.9.
- 45 Toril Moi describes the way in which a similar dilemma seems to face feminist criticism.
- 46 'écriture féminine' is a term coined by Cixous not to describe women's writing in general, but only that which specifically manifests the qualities which she recognises as challenging phallocentrism.  
For a full discussion of Helene Cixous' work see Toril Moi, pp.102-126.
- 47 Hélène Cixous, 'Sorties', reprinted in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, pp.286-293 (p.287).
- 48 Toril Moi, p.105.
- 49 Catherine Belsey made this comment at the Gillian Skillow Memorial Lecture. The lecture was entitled 'A Future for Materialist Feminism?' and was given at Strathclyde University in June 1990.
- 50 It is somewhat surprising how far French feminist theoreticians accept Freudian and Lacanian interpretations of feminine experience, for even Irigaray, who offers a fierce critique of Freud, shows an engagement with his work. One would suspect, after all, that such interpretations are by definition phallocentrically constructed and therefore misleading.
- 51 Again, Toril Moi offers an excellent introduction to Kristeva's work both in *Sexual/Textual Politics*: and in *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi (Oxford, 1986).
- 52 The semiotic is described as the state of being before consciousness in language is developed. At this stage the infant does not perceive itself as separate from the mother and has access to a pre-linguistic arena.
- 53 F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (London, 1948).
- 54 Catherine Belsey, 'Re-reading the great tradition', in *Re-Reading English*, edited



by Peter Widdowson (London, 1982), pp.121-135 (p.129).

55 Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology*, translated by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London, 1967), p.56.

56 Leavis, p.6.

57 Leavis, p.13.

58 Leavis, p.25/26.

59 It should be pointed out that Leavis's analysis also results in a reductive analysis of the novelists whom he condones as his desire to find totality in them leads him to silence the more complex aspects of their work. For a full discussion of this problem see Catherine Belsey's essay 'Re-reading the great tradition'.

60 'Re-reading the great tradition', p.121.

61 A full discussion of this situation will emerge later in this thesis.

CHAPTER 2:

THE LOOK OF HERRIES, THE DICTATES OF REASON: THE  
DECONSTRUCTION OF ROMANCE AND RATIONALITY IN THE FICTION OF  
WALTER SCOTT

Early in *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* an exchange takes place between Jeanie Deans and George Staunton, her sister's seducer.<sup>1</sup> Staunton urges Jeanie to testify in her sister's favour, arguing "you will only speak the simple truth"(p.163). Jeanie, however, refuses, retorting "you would make me tell a falsehood anent it"(p.163). Their positions are irreconcilable, not because either is wrong, but because they are based on quite different notions of what truth is. For Jeanie it is an absolute, based on factual evidence, and requiring a choice between a simple binary opposition. For Staunton, it is a more ambiguous and flexible concept. In this novel, where 'truth' consists of a multiplicity of narrative strands and springs from the most ex-centric of sources, their argument is highly resonant, figuring an exploration into the inadequacy of any simple model of the relationship between truth and lived experience, and any system which seeks to define them in terms of binary opposition, of totality.<sup>2</sup>

Such exploration is, of course, not traditionally associated with Walter Scott, who rather than being noted for any radical quality in his work is remembered for his conservatism and resistance to change. James Hogg condemned this one aspect of his friend, objecting to his over-developed sense of loyalty to the aristocracy, and a fear of anarchy amounting almost to 'obsessive dread'.<sup>3</sup> Nor is it a challenge recognised by traditional criticism of Scott's fiction, which rather than highlighting ontological debate in his work, has focused on the redundant and static images of Scotland it claims to find in it. Nevertheless, such questioning is central not only to *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, but forms an integral part of Scott's major fiction. Throughout, he explores the nature of the relationship between lived experience and totalising models of thought, and the status of our experience and our presentations of it in language and writing. It is my intention in this chapter to explore Scott's work in terms of a challenge to totalising, essentialist versions of identity and historical interpretation, a framework which in the context of postmodernism offers a fruitful and positive re-reading.

Beginning then, by looking at critical responses to Scott's work and the opposition between romance and rationality frequently found in it, I will argue that in fact Scott

*deconstructs* the appropriateness of such a polarised episteme for both national and personal identity. I then look at the awareness of linguistic reflexivity which governs this challenge, exploring reasons for it, and suggesting that it leads to a more widespread subversion of the history/story dialectic in Scott's fiction. Then, I will examine the reflexive and deconstructive strategies which result in his work, before concluding with a reading of *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* in this context.

There can be little doubt that the desire to create some kind of identity for Scotland in his work formed part of Scott's purposes in writing, as he himself describes in the General Preface to the 1829 edition of the *Waverley* novels:

Without being so presumptuous as to hope to emulate the rich humour, pathetic tenderness, and admirable tact, which pervade the works of my accomplished friend, I felt that something might be attempted for my own country of the same kind as that which Miss Edgeworth so fortunately achieved for Ireland - something which might introduce her natives to those of the sister kingdom in a more favourable light than they had been placed hitherto, and tend to procure sympathy for their virtues, and indulgence for their foibles.<sup>4</sup>

If we are to believe the opinions of the Englishmen in Scott's fiction, the need to construct Scotland in a more favourable light is apparent. Edward Waverley, for example, before setting out for Scotland, is given a grim picture of it by his tutor Pembroke who warns him of 'utter darkness' in terms of religious orthodoxy (p.53). Frank Osbaldistone, hero of *Rob Roy*, shows an equally bizarre notion of 'north Britain', believing its inhabitants to be 'interested, selfish, avaricious and tricky'.<sup>5</sup> More problematic, however, is the nature of the identity which Scott was to create for Scotland in his fiction.

Traditional critical responses see the image of Scotland Scott creates in his work as essentially romantic. Moreover, such criticism often concludes that Scott's writing has had a detrimental effect on Scottish society, by creating a redundant and reactionary image of the nation. This conclusion has been persistent, for while Edgar Johnson writing in 1973, may suggest that it is an image of Scott's work finally exploded,

Andrew Hook, writing in the recently published *History of Scottish Literature*, reasserts that the national identity Scott writes for Scotland is indeed fundamentally romantic, recognising in it an appeal to the emotional in terms of topographical and historical description:

Through Scott, the aura of romance finally settled upon Scotland; Scotland's colourful and passionate history, her lochs and rivers and mountains, her loyal, valourous, and proud people, her tradition of poetry and song - all these aspects of Scotland that had already acquired considerable romantic appeal - now appeared in a new and totally irresistible form.<sup>6</sup>

Such an analysis of Scott's work has not led to critical popularity. It has been repeatedly argued that by placing Scotland in a romantic context, Scott destroyed the possibility of providing it with any progressive form of identity. Hook himself suggests as much, for while he recognises that the 'shiny romantic packages' he claims to find in Scott's work may have been 'necessary fictions', it is clear that he also sees them as an unfortunate form of escapism from the kind of historical and political analysis he obviously requires from Scott's writing. Less sympathetic critics see in this supposed image of a romantic Scotland the basis of a sentimental Scottish myth which has led to her cultural and political impoverishment.

This is a reading of Scott's work which Cairns Craig suggests in his article 'The Body in the Kit Bag: History and the Scottish Novel'.<sup>7</sup> Scott, he suggests, by focusing the energy of his fiction upon a disconnected past, destroys the possibility of the Scottish experience as a narrative force, and with any real place in historical development:

What the Enlightenment and Scott between them achieved, in the very decades when they were providing Europe with an historical conception of how societies evolve, was the reduction of Scottish history to a set of stories which could not form a connected evolution but could only be used in juxtaposition with and as a justification of the progressive and progressively non-narratable present.<sup>8</sup>

Such criticisms of Scott seem to be based on what is perceived to be his failure to

provide a realistic and historically progressive description of Scotland, and a corollary provision of a romantic and sentimental image which consigns the Scottish experience to the realms of story.

Edwin Muir, in his study *Scott and Scotland* attempts to analyse the reasons for Scott's so-called 'failure'.<sup>9</sup> Asked to write a study exploring what Scott had done for Scotland, Muir's response was to enunciate instead what Scotland had failed to do for Scott, and indeed, for any of its writers. Scott, Muir concludes, failed simply because Scotland could not supply the background necessary for a great writer:

Yet men of Scott's enormous genius have rarely Scott's faults; they may have others but not these particular ones; and so I was forced to account for the hiatus in Scott's endowment by considering the environment in which he lived, by invoking the fact - if the reader will agree it is one - that he spent many of his days in a hiatus, in a country, that is to say, which was neither a nation nor a province, and had, instead of a centre, a blank, an Edinburgh, in the middle of it.<sup>10</sup>

The de-centred, or ex-centric position, Muir implies, cannot provide the context in which a writer can create great art, for, as he continues, great art must be based in 'realism', and the Scottish situation, failing as it did to provide a fixed ontology from which to write, could not be recorded in any such stable a form:

Yet his essential gift was for the delineation of contemporary life, and his work is greatest where we feel in it the shock of immediate experience. If the life he knew had had a real framework, if it had not been melting and dissolving away before him, he would have had a theme worthy of his powers, and he would have had no need to stuff his head with 'the most nonsensical trash'. But instead of a real framework he had to fall back on legend, and so his novels consist, as I said before, of flesh and blood and pasteboard.<sup>11</sup>

Muir's study is revealing, for it seems to recognise that Scott's basic impuse was mimetic, but implies that since the reality he perceived around him was not a fixed and total one, but one 'melting and dissolving', its portrayal in the work of art is somehow of necessity a failure. Such an argument is a familiar, if debilitating one, for it implies that a 'reality' which presents itself as total and absolute is essentially superior to one - to use Derrida's phrase - 'in excess' of that totality, and that the latter, precisely

because it challenges a fixed ontology, may be silenced or dismissed as 'a blank, an Edinburgh', a *lacuna* impotent in its marginalisation, its embracing of *différance*.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly, such reasoning is to some extent illogical, for however Edinburgh may be constituted, it is certainly solid and very real for those who live in it.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, criticisms of Scott's work and the image of Scotland he portrays as romantic seem to be based on similar modes of oppositional thought. Thus for Hook romance seems to be defined as that which appeals to the emotions rather than to the more rational instincts, a formulation polarising emotion and reason. Scotland's landscape and history, he suggests, actually incorporate in themselves such an emotional polarity and appeal. The association of romance with the emotional aspects of experience is of course a standard one, and part of the impulse behind the Romantic project too was the need to acknowledge the emotional or irrational aspects of human experience in opposition to the rationality of the Enlightenment.<sup>14</sup> However, by describing this supposedly integral emotional appeal in Scotland's past and landscape as a 'shiny romantic package', Hook is clearly accepting a binary opposition between it and a more utilitarian history and topography. As Derrida suggests, such a construction will characteristically involve the death or negation of one half of this equation to allow for the superiority of the other, and Scotland's landscape and history as it is presented by Scott is by virtue of its 'romantic' nature consigned to a 'non-history', or 'story'.

This binary opposition between history and fiction is one also implied by Cairns Craig's analysis. Scott, he argues, 'reduced Scottish history to a set of stories', thus suggesting once more that the romantic and the emotional must necessarily be aligned with 'fiction', and as a result, dismissed or silenced. Story is thus opposed to history, which, he implies, offers a progressive and total vision of how societies evolve.

Such oppositions are, of course, largely accepted ones, but they are frameworks which have been challenged in the postmodern context. Recognising that language is fundamentally evasive and reflexive, post-structuralist thought suggests that oppositions like that between reason and emotion, romance and realism are inadequate, even deceptive and that the degree of 'slippage' existing between these terms renders



such oppositions problematic. Reading Scott's work in terms of these oppositions is similarly misleading, for they demand that certain types of material, such as the chivalric codes, wild adventures and dramatic denouement which we align with the romance genre be thus divorced from 'real' experience. Such a disjunction is, however, very much a 'slippery' one, for as Edgar Johnson points out, 'intrinsically there is nothing more romantic about portcullises than plumbing about wimples than atomic warheads'.<sup>15</sup> 'Romance', he concludes, is the result of an attitude, not of the material chosen, and it is an attitude which he does not find in Scott's fiction.

Attempts to align Scott with the Idealist Romanticism of his contemporaries are equally misleading, for while Scott admired the work of Wordsworth, and of Byron in particular, he rejected the overall 'project' which he saw them as attempting to achieve. This is hardly surprising, for the Romantic poets, reacting against the principles of the Enlightenment, in part contributed to an epistemology grounded on oppositional Idealism. It was the Romantics who proposed a sharp disjunction between reason and emotion, the rational and the irrational, suggesting that they were 'opposites' to be reconciled.<sup>16</sup> Scott's work, on the contrary, explores the inadequacies of the oppositions between terms like reason and emotion, suggesting that such a binary grammar may be an inadequate framework within which to describe the world and Scottish experience.

Reading Scott in terms of such binary oppositions is thus misleading for

what emerges in Scott's fiction is an exploration of the inadequacy of constructing identity - both personal and national - within such frameworks. Experience, he suggests, is more ambiguous, refusing to be consigned to any totalising model, constantly breaking free from any rigid epistemic system imposed upon it. Such rigidly oppositional epistemes, Hélène Cixous suggests, are fatal for the marginalised culture and it is not surprising that Scott should show an unease with them in his fiction.<sup>17</sup> In the face of such structures he offers an image of identity itself 'melting and dissolving', one which challenges the concepts of centrality and totality, and posits in their place a more fluid and ambiguous model of experience.

In order that his work may be fully appreciated, therefore, it is necessary to reject traditional categories of binary opposition, and to look instead at the ways in which Scott, in his fictions, explores the inadequacies and the dangers of them.

Scott's awareness of the problematics compromising the rigid definitions of such terms as 'romance' and 'history' is expressed in his essay on 'Romance' for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*:

A composition may be a legitimate romance, yet neither refer to romance nor chivalry - to war nor to the middle ages. The 'wild adventures' is almost the only absolutely essential ingredient in Johnson's definition. We would be rather inclined to describe a *Romance* 'as a fictitious narrative in prose or verse; the interest of which turns upon marvellous and uncommon incidents'; being thus opposed to the kindred term *Novel* which Johnson has described as 'a smooth tale, generally of love;' but which we would rather define as 'a fictitious narrative, differing from the romance, because accommodated to the ordinary train of events, and the modern state of society'. Assuming these definitions, it is evident, from the nature of the distinction adopted, that there may exist compositions which it is difficult to assign precisely or exclusively to the one class or other; and which, in fact, partake of the nature of both. But the distinction will be found broad enough to answer all general and useful purposes.<sup>18</sup>

Clearly, Scott is unhappy with the traditional distinction between romance and novel, but like Hook and Cairns Craig seems to align the novel more closely with ordinary experience, and the romance with a description of events outside the ordinary train of it. Significantly, Scott's own work however, seems to defy description within these terms. His unease with this form of categorisation is apparent in a dissatisfaction with comparisons of his own fiction both to romance and realism. While, in his *Journal* he expresses an admiration for the work of Jane Austen, for example, he is uneasy with those who attempt to define his own novels in similar terms:

Also read again, and for the third time at least, Miss Austen's very finely written novel of *Pride and Prejudice*. That young lady had a talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life, which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with. The Big Bow-wow strain I can do myself like any now going; but the exquisite touch, which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting, from the truth of the description and the

sentiment, is denied to me.<sup>19</sup>

While his intention may be to provide a picture of his native country, it would seem that 'truth of description and sentiment' is not the method by which he aims to do it. Nor, however, can the 'Big Bow-wow' strain readily be identified with romance, for Scott shows a reluctance to place his work in this category, as his anxiety over the title of *Redgauntlet* demonstrates. For Scott, romance retained connotations of the medieval period and of tales of chivalry; 'Redgauntlet', chosen as a title by James Ballantyne might suggest just such a type of narrative, and his audience, Scott anticipated, would be disappointed.<sup>20</sup>

This is also a problem with which he engages in the first chapter of *Waverley*, for he outlines his awareness that the title of the novel will raise generic expectations in the reader. While 'Waverley' is chosen for its neutrality - 'an uncontaminated name, bearing with it little sound of good or evil' - Scott's sub-title proves more problematic. 'A Romance from the German' must be discounted, for the novel does not fulfil such expectations. 'A Tale of the Times' is equally unsuitable, for his novel does not provide a 'dashing sketch of the fashionable world'. 'Sixty Years Since' is in the end chosen, because it describes a category of novel somewhere between the two methods:

By fixing, then, the date of my story Sixty Years before the present 1st November 1805, I would have my readers understand, that they will meet in the following pages neither a romance of chivalry, nor a tale of modern manners; that my hero will have neither iron on his shoulders, as of yore, nor on the heels of his boots, as is the present fashion of Bond Street; and that my damsels will neither be clothed 'in purple and in pall' like the Lady Alice of an old ballad, nor reduced to the primitive nakedness of a modern fashionable at a rout. From this my choice of an era the understanding critic may farther presage, that the object of my tale is more a description of men than manners.(p.23)

This discussion reveals Scott's dissatisfaction with post-Enlightenment categories of description for his own work which is 'difficult to assign precisely or exclusively to one class or other', undermining as it does the traditional distinction between romance and realism, romance and the novel. Such an ambiguous position is reflected in his novels which contain both apparently realistic description - the detailed account

of the interior of Sanders Mucklebait's bothie in *The Antiquary* for instance, - alongside elements of almost gothic romance in the conclusion of the same novel.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* shows a blend of sharp social analysis in its description of the Porteous riots and the street brawls which accompany them, alongside the 'romantic' Madge Wildfire with her broadsheet ballads. A similar elision of modes is found in *Redgauntlet* which, while seeming to condone the pragmatic approach which describes the end of romance and the final death of Jacobitism nevertheless includes the most romantic of elements.<sup>22</sup> Rather than negating such elements, however, Scott suggests that it is in them, 'Wandering Willie's Tale', for example, that the secrets of 'truth' and 'identity' may be revealed. The contraction of these elements traditionally polarised elements within Scott's novels obviously renders untenable any easy categorisation of them, for while they contain elements of the romance genre - wild adventures, mysterious characters and dramatic denouement - they also display sharp social description and analysis which seems to dissociate them from the romance proper. To use Roman Jakobson's description, Scott seems to blend elements of both the 'metaphoric' and the 'metonymic' poles of writing, disrupting the reader's expectations of the way in which the text is operating.<sup>23</sup>

Such a typological unsettling is typical of the postmodern novel in its attempt to resist traditional generic categories and the binary opposition between metaphor and metonymy.<sup>24</sup> In a very similar way Scott 'short circuits' this distinction to disrupt the relationship between our expectations and our ways of reading the text. Within such a mode traditional categories such as those of 'realism' and 'romance' become slippery, incapable of offering any fixed description of the way in which the text relates to lived experience. The impetus behind such 'short circuiting' in the postmodern novel is highly theoretical, resulting from a direct desire to resist absolute categorisation.<sup>25</sup> In Scott's work, however, it seems to result far more from his experience of the problematics of the Scottish situation.

Scott's own definitions of the terms 'romance' and 'novel' incorporate this problematic since his distinction between the 'ordinary train of events' and 'the

marvellous and the extraordinary' is implicitly in his work a matter of historical or geographical positioning - to use Wittgenstein's concept, is a matter of *context*. What may appear, 'marvellous and uncommon' in one context, may emerge as part of 'the ordinary train of events' in another, thus once again unsettling any easy distinction between romance and realism.<sup>26</sup> Such a paradox seems to be symptomatic of the Scottish situation, for it is one with which Scott engages in his *Quarterly Review* essay on the *Waverley* novels, published anonymously in 1817. The Scottish way of life, he suggests, is one which is bound to lead to 'romance' when depicted, for it will necessarily appear 'marvellous and uncommon' to the English reader:

The traditions and manners of the Scotch were so blended with superstitious practices and fears, that the author of these novels seems to have deemed it incumbent to transfer many more such incidents on his novels than seem either probable or natural to an English reader.<sup>27</sup>

In *Waverley*, Scott brings the realities of the Scottish experience into juxtaposition with just such abstract categories of binary distinction, for part of Waverley's journey of self-discovery involves the recognition that the distinctions between romance and reality, history and story may not be as sharply distinguished as he had imagined. Brought up on a diet of romance, having read 'poets who have exercised themselves on romantic fiction' and having studied the French, Spanish and Italian romances 'which, from the days of Pulci, have been a favourite exercise of the wits of Italy', Waverley certainly has a firm grasp of the romance genre(p.35). However, he is equally convinced that his musings in the romantic arena are entirely divorced from any contact with lived experience:

So far was Edward Waverley from expecting general sympathy with his own feelings, or concluding that the present state of things was calculated to exhibit the reality of those visions in which he loved to indulge, that he dreaded nothing more than the detection of such sentiments as were dictated by his musings. He neither had nor wished to have a confidant with whom to communicate his reveries; and so sensible was he of the ridicule attached to them, that, had he been to choose between any punishment short of ignominy, and the



necessity of giving a cold and composed account of the ideal world in which he lived the better part of his days, I think he would not have hesitated to prefer the former infliction.(p.41/42)

Once he reaches Scotland, however, Edward Waverley discovers that such experiences cannot be so easily consigned to the realms of legend and story; cannot be so easily 'silenced', but burst out of such categories to form an important part of the Scottish situation.

When Edward arrives in Scotland such categories are ones which swiftly begin to disintegrate. Arriving at Tully -Veolan he discovers that elements which he had thought only part of romance and story form in Scotland part of the on-going reality. An evident collapsing of the categories of 'art' and 'life' is implied in Scott's description of the castle, as the narrator tells us how the Scottish peasants resemble those from romantic painting and literature. This description could simply be described as a romantic one, yet, by deliberately emphasising that it 'somewhat resembled Italian forms of landscape', and that it would appeal to 'a lover of the picturesque', Scott's 'chapter of still life' is somewhat more unsettling, for it suggests that while the scene is being presented 'realistically', it very clearly contains what are normally construed as romantic elements(p.59). The description of the castle itself is equally dislocative, for while with its gates and bear sculptures it seems to belong to the world of gothic fiction, Scott is careful to cite in his footnotes examples which support the existence of such castles in Scotland. For both Waverley and the reader such an experience is disruptive, for it suggests that while such descriptions may appear 'romantic', they cannot be readily silenced, or as Cairns Craig suggests, simply consigned to the category of 'story'.

Waverley's experiences in Scotland only serve to further dismantle or deconstruct the distinctions he held between romance and real experience. Hearing of the disruptions between the Highland and Lowland Scots, Waverley again is surprised to discover that apparently romantic elements form part of the Scottish day to day reality:

It seemed like a dream to Waverley that these deeds of violence should

be familiar to men's minds and currently talked of, as falling within the common order of things, and happening daily in the immediate vicinity, without his having crossed the seas, and while he was yet in the otherwise well-ordered island of Great Britain.(p.110)

At Tully-Veolan, then, Waverley discovers that what forms 'the ordinary train of events' consists of what he had previously defined as 'the marvellous and uncommon,' and we are told that he 'starts' as he discovers that Rose's experiences resemble so closely those scenes which 'he had used to conjure up in his imagination as only occurring in ancient times, and spoke of it coolly, as one very likely to recur'(p.109). If Waverley is unsettled by Rose, however, his categories for distinguishing between romance and realism collapse completely when he is confronted by Flora Mac-Ivor.

The descriptions of Flora and Fergus Mac-Ivor are clearly offered by Scott as romantic, for the setting which he provides for them, and the descriptions of the Highlands against which he sets them, include all the elements which we identify with romantic topography. However, Scott's intention here, as elsewhere in *Waverley* seems to be to undercut any attempt this might induce simply to dismiss such landscapes or experiences from any description of Scottish identity. Waverley, certainly, is forced to acknowledge that Flora, while appearing as a creature of 'his wildest dreams', forms a potent force in Scottish experience and politics:

Edward thought he had never, even in his wildest dreams, imagined a figure of such exquisite and interesting loveliness. The wild beauty of the retreat, bursting upon him as if by magic, augmented the mingled feeling of delight and awe with which he approached her, like a fair enchantress of Boiardo and Ariosto, by whose rod the scenery around him seemed to have been created, an Eden in the wilderness.(p.154)

R.D.S. Jack, commenting on this aspect of Scott's fiction argues that it suggests that if 'Romance is a world of illusion... it is a world in which the sane must also participate'.<sup>28</sup> His argument seems justified by Scott's collapsing of the distinctions between romance and real experience. These aspects of identity apparently 'in excess' of any simple or absolute description form a vital part of the Scottish experience, one which refuses to be silenced, demands to be voiced.



In the light of the above, it is hardly surprising, that in his work Scott should explore the *dangers* of consigning so-called romantic elements of experience and emotional aspects of identity to the realm of story or fiction, thus failing to take them into account in any model of experience or construction of identity. Such a challenge to a fixed oppositional method of categorising human experience is one explored in *Waverley* by initially setting up such a system of opposition, and examining the dangers and inadequacies of it.

Such a polarity is set up in the novel between the forces of Jacobitism and the Highlands on the one hand, and those of the Lowlands and the Loyalists on the other. The power of Jacobitism is aligned with the romantic and the emotional, and this is the essence of its appeal to Waverley with his love of stories:

To be thus personally solicited for assistance by a Prince, whose form and manners, as well as the spirit he displayed in this singular enterprise, answered his ideas of a hero of romance; to be courted by him in the ancient halls of his paternal palace, recovered by the sword which he was already bending towards other conquests, gave Edward, in his own eyes, the dignity and importance which he had ceased to consider as his attributes. Rejected, slandered, and threatened upon the one side, he was irresistably attracted to the cause which the prejudices of education, and the political principles of his family, had already recommended as the most just.(p.263)

Rationality and the forces of reason, on the other hand, are aligned with the forces of the union, for while Flora Mac-Ivor and the Highlands may offer Waverley adventure, the government offers him a stability and order which becomes increasingly attractive as the novel develops. Again, this is expressed through Waverley's perception of the landscape which reflects such order as he approaches the government forces:

He then, for the first time since leaving Edinburgh, began to experience that pleasure which almost all feel who return to a verdant, populous, and highly cultivated country, from scenes of waste desolation or of solitary and melancholy grandeur.(p.434)

At the conclusion of the novel, however, this binary construction emerges as a self-consuming one. While Waverley may seem to align himself with 'rational'

forces, he does so not because he has recognised the 'fictional' nature of Jacobite politics, but precisely because he recognises their very vital potency. It is a force which Fergus Mac-Ivor at least is willing to die for, and Waverley learns that to dismiss such elements in the Scottish position is to undervalue an integral aspect of human experience.

The lines of this opposition have, of course, been recognised by traditional criticism. As a result of its outworking, critics claim, Scott creates a redundant and romantic image of Scotland, which, tied as it is to the forces of Jacobitism and the 1745 rebellion necessarily becomes a defeated and subjugated identity. This, however, is misleading, for it suggests both that the romantic forces Scott calls into play are simplistically and wholly aligned with Scotland and that the forces of romance and rationality which he appears to set in opposition are in the end entirely resolved, with Jacobitism completely and finally silenced. But, this is a reading of the *Waverley* novels which cannot be consistently supported. Scott's work is, in fact, more problematic than such readings suggest, for, just as he constantly unsettles the opposition between romance and realism, so too he questions any definition of Scotland which seeks to posit it in terms of romance or rationality alone. Identity, he proposes, cannot be expressed in terms of clear oppositions, but must be recognised as multiplistic, slippery, 'in excess', consisting in the deconstructive melting and dissolving of forces of emotion and reason.

Certainly, this is what is suggested by *Waverley*. Reductive analyses of Scott's work suggest that the opposition set up in the novel between a romantic Jacobite Scotland on the one hand and a historically vital Hanoverian England on the other implies in its rejection of romanticism the defeat of all that remains of Scottish identity. This reading, as has been indicated, is subtly 'exploded' however: the polarities explored are ones existing *within* Scotland itself, as, for example, between Highland and Lowland culture. Such a reading of Scott's work is implicit in their settings, for repeatedly his novels inhabit the *border lands* between cultures, times, and civilisations, terrains where 'opposing' forces meet to give a fluid and dynamic image

of identity. 'Deconstruction', writes Henry Staten, 'probes the boundaries of our concepts, and the sense that these concepts have *within* these boundaries becomes questionable *at* the boundaries'.<sup>29</sup> It is, Scott suggests, such sites which generate figural potency, just as it is the clash of different worlds which creates the energy surrounding Rob Roy in the novel which bears his name:

It is the strong contrast betwixt the civilised and cultivated mode of life on the one side of the Highland line, and the wild and lawless adventures which were habitually undertaken and achieved by one who dwelt on the opposite side of that ideal boundary, which creates the interest attached to his name.<sup>30</sup>

'That boundary', is, however, '*ideal*', and Scottish identity as it emerges in the novels consists not of a dichotomous antagonism between Highland and Lowland culture, but on the contrary, a shifting matrix of the two which creates a complex and ambiguous model of Scottish experience.

Scotland is, consequently, described in Scott's fiction not in terms of romantic forces alone, but on the contrary as a set of shifting tensions which any image of Scotland must accommodate. Fergus Mac-Ivor, for example, the guardian of romantic sentiments, forms only part of Scottish experience, and belongs firmly in the Highlands. Scotland, however, consists also of the Lowlands, and its figural identity in rationality. Scotland emerges, as Rose Bradwardine outlines to Waverley on his arrival in the country, as the site where apparently opposing and excluding forces co-exist, dissolving together to form an ambivalent rather than a binary model of identity:

'But the Lowlanders call him, like other gentlemen, by then name of his estate, Glennaquoich, and the Highlanders call him Vich Ian Vohr, that is, the son of John the Great; and we upon the braes here call him both names indifferently.'(p.108/109)

Romantic forces are, in fact, seldom in Scott's work aligned with the country as an entirety but repeatedly form only part of its identity. The Highlands are, we are reminded in *Waverley*, and elsewhere in Scott's fiction, as alien to some parts of Scotland as they are to her English neighbour, and Jacobite sentiments are as

controversial within Scotland, as *Waverley's* experiences in Cairnvreckan show, as they are outside of it. The Highlands, as Scott outlines in the General Preface to the *Waverley* novels, may be a fit subject for romance, but Scotland consists too of Mr Fairford senior, Bailie Jarvie, and the forces of the Enlightenment.<sup>30</sup>

Such an ambiguous and multiplistic image of Scotland in Scott's fiction, undercutting as it does any absolute model of identity celebrates that which is 'in excess' of such totality. Rather than seeking to present any absolute image of Scotland, Scott, it is clear, strives to acknowledge the differences and tensions within it, a reading further supported structurally by the fact that rather than resolving the forces he sets in play in his fiction, Scott seems anxious to suggest the impossibility, and indeed the dangers, of silencing through resolution any of these aspects of experience.

This contention is obviously very much at odds with the reading proposed by Georg Lukàcs which praises Scott's fiction for the way in which it allegedly *does* illustrate the resolution of contradictory forces -predominantly those of Jacobitism and Union - into the harmonious path of history. In *The Historical Novel*, Lukàcs interprets the tensions in Scott's work as those of historical dialectic, and suggests that they are eventually resolved into the harmony of 'the middle way'.<sup>32</sup> This dialectic, Lukàcs proposes, is essentially a class one, but may also be interpreted as a dialectic between the past and the on-going forces of history and between romantic and rational positions. Its resolution, he suggests, is the triumph of new times over old, of rational outlooks over romantic:

What is expressed here, above all, is a renunciation of Romanticism, a conquest of Romanticism, a higher development of the realist literary traditions of the Enlightenment in keeping with the new times.<sup>33</sup>

Lukàcs' reading of Scott in terms of dialectical reconciliation is based upon an

interpretation of his heroes. These heroes, he maintains, by resolving tensions between romantic and rationalistic forces in their own lives, embody a similar resolution in British history:

Scott belongs neither with the ardent enthusiasts of this development, nor with its pathetic, passionate indicters. He attempts by fathoming historically the whole of English development to find a 'middle way'. He finds in English history the consolation that the most violent vicissitudes of class struggle have always finally calmed down into a glorious 'middle way'.<sup>34</sup>

A reading in terms of Lukàcs' 'middle way', however, arguably suggests far too harmonious a conclusion to Scott's novels, and too simple an understanding of his heroes. These 'heroes' can, in fact, be read in terms of the need to acknowledge within themselves paradoxical and at times unsettling forces of reason and emotion, rationality and instinct. The identity Scott creates for them incorporates not a resolution of these forces - which after all is simply a silencing of the romantic - but an exploration of the importance of acknowledging that their identity involves a recognition of both sides of this apparent, but in fact exploded, dialectic. Such unresolved tensions within Scott's heroes, have, indeed, led to repeated criticism by those who argue that protagonists who embrace such paradox within themselves cannot be 'heroic' in the true sense of the word, a criticism which has its origin in Scott's own 1817 *Quarterly Review* article, which, itself a telling mass of ambiguity and paradox, suggests that no sustained interest can be attached to heroes so inconsistent and flexible. Such a form of protagonist, the anonymous Scott concludes, can only be the result of the author's willingness to sacrifice all for temporary effect:

The insipidity of this author's heroes may be also in part referred to the readiness with which he twists and turns his story to produce some immediate and perhaps temporary effect. This could hardly be done without representing the principal character either as inconsistent or flexible in his principles. The ease with which Waverley adopts and afterwards forsakes the Jacobite party in 1745 is a good example of what we mean. Had he been painted as a steady character, his conduct would have been improbable.<sup>35</sup>



But this reading of *Waverley* seems to ignore the larger tensions at work in the novel, and it is hardly surprising that later in the article Scott actually refutes his own criticism: 'We give the praise due to one who has collected and brought out with accuracy and effect, incidents and manners which might otherwise have slept in oblivion', states the reviewer, suggesting that it is only in this ambiguous and paradoxical blend of romantic and rationalistic, emotional and practical, that 'whole' reality, or Scottish identity, if we so frame it, can be found.<sup>36</sup> Scott's heroes are flexible, it appears, because the world does not fall into neat binary oppositions, and to choose between such positions is both exclusive and artificial.

The identity which Scott creates for Scotland is, then one which seeks to deconstruct any simple opposition between romance and rationality, Jacobitism and Loyalism, suggesting that one cannot be finally subjugated to the other in the stable creating of a total or absolute identity structure. On the contrary, these forces co-exist within Scotland, each 'in excess' to the totality of the other. This challenge is one manifested both in Scott's heroes and his reluctance to offer them any type of thematic closure or resolution. In highlighting the flexibility and ambivalence of these heroes in the *Quarterly Review*, Scott draws explicit attention to the importance of this strategy. While the marriage of Edward to Rose Bradwardine for instance may appear to offer some form of resolution, it does so not by 'the conquest of the forces of romanticism', but by a recognition that these forces form an important part of lived experience. Again, such emotional forces are a potent part of Scottish identity, and cannot be readily silenced in any construction of it. While *Waverley* may refute the Jacobite cause in any practical sense, the end of the novel sees Tully-Veolan restored both to its former owner and its 'romantic' glory. In the midst of *Waverley*'s new life, consequently, there hangs a portrait of himself in his Jacobite role, a reminder of the inadequacy of any model of experience which seeks to silence this represented 'otherness', this 'trace' of alternative modes of experience:



There was an addition to this fine old apartment, however, which drew tears into the Baron's eyes. It was a large and spirited painting, representing Fergus Mac-Ivor and Waverley in their Highland dress, the scene a wild, rocky, and mountainous pass, down which the clan were descending in the background. It was taken from a spirited sketch, drawn while they were in Edinburgh by a young man of high genius, and had been painted on a full-length scale by an eminent London artist. Raeburn himself (whose Highland Chiefs do all but walk out of the canvas) could not have done more justice to the subject; and the ardent, fiery, and impetuous character of the unfortunate Chief of Glennaquoich was finely contrasted with the contemplative, fanciful, and enthusiastic expression of his happier friend. Beside this painting hung the arms which Waverley had borne in the unfortunate civil war. The whole piece was beheld with admiration, and deeper feelings.(p.445)

Scott's description of this painting is crucial, and one which articulates much of his attitude to Scottish identity. As a political force, Jacobitism seems defeated. Yet to set a rational and pragmatic path in opposition to the emotional attachment Waverley retains for it is to construct an artificial model of experience. Waverley's new found Enlightenment 'pragmatism', therefore, must incorporate within itself a recognition that it cannot simply be opposed to 'romanticism', but that such ex-centric 'deeper feelings' remain a very real part of his identity. The presence of this painting at Tully-Veolan and at the end of the novel, therefore, serves as a reminder that experience does not fall into neat binary categories, but exists as a shifting amalgam of apparently contradictory dynamic forces.

The identity Scott is creating for Scotland in his fiction, then, begins to emerge in *Waverley* as one which refuses to silence those voices of Jacobitism and Scotland's emotional attachment to it, albeit they are voices which unsettle any total model. This dynamic is also one which Scott develops in *Rob Roy* where contradictory and hence deconstructive forces - commerce and clanship - are located in the identities of Bailie Jarvie and Rob Roy MacGregor, both 'the highest pitch of civilisation', and 'the half savage state of society'. Both Glasgow and the Highlands, we are again reminded, form Scotland, and the apparently irreconcilable tensions between them resist fixing Scottish identity into a stable binary system:



The dusky mountains of the western Highlands often sent forth wilder tribes to frequent the marts of St Mungo's favourite city. Hordes of wild, shaggy, dwarfish cattle and ponies, conducted by Highlanders, as wild as shaggy, and sometimes as dwarfish, as the animals they had in charge, often traversed the streets of Glasgow. Strangers gazed with surprise on the antique and fantastic dress, and listened to the unknown and dissonant sounds of their language, while the mountaineers, armed, even while engaged in this peaceful occupation, with musket and pistol, sword, dagger, and target, stared with astonishment on the articles of luxury of which they knew not the use, and with an avidity which seemed somewhat alarming on the articles which they knew and valued.(p.227/228)

These tensions between city and Highland Scot express apparently opposing forces co-existing within Scotland, each refusing to be subjugated to the other. The refusal of these forces to give way into any kind of resolved system is one which Scott again expresses artistically by the refusal of the novel to close into any neat pattern or total form - static or dialectical - either thematically or structurally. Julia Kristeva identifies such non-closure as symptomatic of 'radical writing', and certainly, Frank Osbaldistone's manuscript which forms the basic narrative thread of the novel, ends abruptly and indeterminately.<sup>37</sup> Final meaning in the novel is deferred rather than resolved, given over to a number of letters which serve only to heighten the ambivalent view of Rob Roy which we have formed in the course of the novel. Thematically too, the novel incorporates a process of deferral, for forces of romance and Jacobitism are, as Rob's own case suggests, even less easily dissipated than narrative. While Frank Osbaldistone, hero of *Rob Roy*, may renounce a life of adventure for one of commerce, thus apparently letting old forces give way to new, he may do so, like Waverley, only by acknowledging the *différance*, the romantic forces within himself, and, as his marriage to Die Vernon suggests, constructing them as part of his new identity. Identity for Frank, as for Waverley, embraces both paradox and a collapsing of binary distinctions in upon themselves, to suggest that forces as potent as Rob Roy cannot simply be silenced or dismissed as story, but remain an unsettling and persistent aspect of experienced identity:

Old Andrew Fairservice used to say, that 'There were many things  
ower bad for blessing and ower gude for banning, like *ROB*

'Many things', that is, in Scottish experience, which refuse to be defined in neat categories of binary opposition, thus challenging any construction of Scotland in terms of a total system. Aspects of Scottish experience which Scott, by refusing to silence in his own fiction, voices as a part of his dynamic model of Scottish identity, a dynamic unsettling at both a personal and national level.

Charles Altieri, in his article on Wittgenstein and Derrida, suggests that such essentialist systems have been sustained because the philosophical enterprise has been divorced from the vicissitudes of actual experience.<sup>38</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that it is typically through the lower class characters in Scott's fiction - those most divorced from the luxury of 'ideal' constructions of existence- that we are brought up against systems and oppositions only to find that they are inadequate. These minor, ex-centric characters in Scott's fiction are almost always less devoted to either the Jacobite cause or what may be construed as a romantic or chivalric code than their superiors. While as a result they may, like the shopkeepers in *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, or Edie Ochiltree in *The Antiquary*, undercut a pull towards romance or its more negative aspect sentimentality, they also exhibit less of an opposition between their emotional and pragmatic selves, seeming to recognise that the world cannot be so easily divided. Nanty Ewart in *Redgauntlet* perhaps offers the most striking example, for although he is clearly both an opportunist and a Protestant, he retains some attachment to Charles Edward, refusing to betray him to the treachery of Cristal Nixon, 'not if there were a hundred Popes, Devils, and Pretenders'(p.428). Wandering Willie in the same novel describes a similarly equivocal attitude on the part of his ancestor Steenie Steenson who, he claims, was by principle neither Whig nor Tory, but adopted a path of expediency rather than morally or ideologically essentialist higher feeling:

The like o' Steenie wasna the sort that they made Whigs o'. And so he became a Tory, as they ca' it, which we now ca' Jacobites, just out of a kind of needcessity, that he might belang to some side or other. He

had nae ill-will to the Whig bodies, and liked little to see the blude rin,  
though, being obliged to follow Sir Robert in hunting and hoisting,  
watching and warding, he saw muckle mischief, and maybe did some,  
that he couldna avoid.(p.114)

Such behaviour is typically subversive, for it disrupts 'secure' images of Scotland which seek to construe her identity in binary, oppositional terms. By showing such oppositions in the process of 'melting and dissolving', collapsing in on themselves in an epistemological elision, Scott creates, likewise, a disruptive, deconstructive, 'radical' image of Scotland.

Significantly, this aspect of Scott's work and Scott's character has not gone unnoticed, for although not fully articulated, it is the basis of both Leavis's and Muir's criticisms.<sup>39</sup> Such critics see the unresolved tensions in his work, however, as a mark of inadequacy, and even those who look more favourably on his fiction see such lack of 'resolution', as the main aesthetic problem in his writing.<sup>40</sup> By way of explanation, such tension has been described in terms of the now famous concept of *antisyzygy*, that 'swithering of modes', in the Scottish psyche identified by C.Gregory Smith in 1919 as an obstacle to artistic unity.<sup>41</sup>

Such *antisyzygy* may not necessarily be seen as failure, however, for as Hugh MacDiarmid implies, it may offer a positive refusal to become fixed into a rigid form of totality:

Fatal division in my thought they think  
Who forget that although the thrush  
Is more cheerful and constant, the lark  
More continuous and celestial, and, after all,  
The irritating cuckoo unique  
In singing a musical interval,  
Yet the nightingale remains supreme,  
The nightingale whose thin high call  
And that deep throb,  
Which seem to come from different birds  
In different places, find an emotion  
And vibrate in the memory as the song  
Of no other bird - not even  
The love-note of the curlew -  
Can do!<sup>42</sup>

Antisysygy -or at least the refusal to silence one half of a binary opposition and so close off certain aspects of identity - is similarly a quality which has come to be appreciated in the postmodern period. It offers, in fact, a parallel with Derrida's attempt to acknowledge a system of deferral within his writing, for it brings into play the degree of slippage which exists within total systems and between apparently contradictory linguistic terms such as 'Jacobite' and 'Loyalist'. Such 'antisysygy' or swithering of modes and sentiments within the text, like Derrida's deconstruction, launches an attack against absolute systems of thought and language, constantly seeking to 'shake their totality.'

Scott's refusal to describe Scottish identity in any rigid or settled form may, therefore, be seen not as a project which renders Scottish identity moribund, but, on the contrary, one which challenges its 'death' or loss of vitality by subverting the fixed systems which might seek to silence her alternative perspectives and ambiguous models of experience and identity.

But of course, in shaking such totalising forces Scott seems to challenge in his fiction the very impulses which he ostensibly condones both in his relationship with George IV and his support for the union. Such paradox is, however, evident in Scott's character, for in spite of his general support for the union and his fostering of Scotland's position in it, it is clear that his political sentiments were far from unproblematic. On the contrary, Scott's personal position, like the cultural identity explores for Scotland in his work, is a fundamentally ambiguous one, one which refuses to subjugate the emotional to the rational, recognising that such forces cannot be so easily divided or silenced, a position evident in his thoughts toward the Jacobite Rebellion, as he describes them here in a letter of 1813:

Seriously, I am very glad I did not live in 1745 for though as a lawyer I could not have pleaded Charles's right and as a clergyman I could not have prayed for him yet as a soldier I would I am sure against the convictions of my better reason have fought for him even to the bottom of the gallows.<sup>43</sup>

Such sentiments are, necessarily, problematic for the Sheriff of Selkirk, yet they are

ones which he exhibits throughout his life. While Scott clearly approved of and supported union with England, it is equally clear that for him this did not imply any homogeneous image of the two countries or any loss of Scotland's separate cultural identity. Throughout his life he adopted the somewhat paradoxical path of, on the one hand fostering Scotland's position in the union, and on the other, constantly asserting her difference. Scotland might form part of Britain, but for Scott this did not negate her right to a separate banking system, to her crown jewels, and to Mons Meg. On the contrary, it was within the union that such symbols of Scottish identity needed to be asserted rather than silenced, for without them, Scott recognised, all that was Scotland would be lost forever.

Scott's awareness that any totalising vision of Britain would necessarily mean the death of all things Scottish resulted, unlike Derrida's awareness of the way in which binary oppositions operate, not from a philosophical position, but from his understanding of Scottish lived experience. Nevertheless, they resulted both in his life and in his writing in an assault on a 'total' vision, since, for Scott, any such totality represented a tragedy which he foresaw as unbearable. As much is suggested by the following entry in his diary which reinforces Scott's awareness of the need for a separate Scottish cultural identity. Faced with a proposal to limit to the Bank of England the right to print bank notes of five pounds and upwards, Scott had assumed the persona of Malachi Malagrowther with which to launch an attack on the notion:

Talks of the uproar about *Malachi*; but I am tired of *Malachi* - the humour is off, and I have said what I wanted to say, and put the people of Scotland on their guard, as well as Ministers, if they like to be warned. They are gradually destroying what remains of nationality, and making the country *tabula rasa* for doctrines of bold innovation. Their loosening and grinding down all those peculiarities which distinguished us as Scotsmen will throw the country into a state in which it will be universally turned to democracy, and instead of canny Saunders, they will have a very dangerous North British neighbourhood.<sup>44</sup>

It is hardly surprising then, that in his writing he should have explored the dangers of constructing both personal and national identity in terms of such totality of the binary

oppositions upon which it rests.

This indeed, is the subject of *Redgauntlet*, which, far more than even the 'historical' explorations of *Waverley* and *Rob Roy*, is a study of the nature of identity, and the inadequacy of models of the self which seek to construe it in terms of an opposition between the rational and the emotional, the reason and the senses. *Redgauntlet* is, in fact, the study of a man in search of both his name and nationality, the very indices of his being. His search incorporates a need on the part of Scott to explore his own identity, and to exorcize a 'shallow romantic attitude to the end of the Jacobite tradition', A.O.J.Cockshut proposes, suggesting that while Jacobitism may retain an emotional appeal, it must finally be consigned to the realms of 'memory' and 'nostalgia'.<sup>45</sup>

In fact, *Redgauntlet* displays a far more complex set of responses to identity, 'romance' and to the Jacobite rebellion than Cockshut's analysis suggests, for again, like Scott's earlier fiction, it explores the dangers of defining identity, now located in the actual self, in terms of such absolute categories, and of silencing the ex-centric aspects of it.

Crucial to an understanding of this exploration, the structure of *Redgauntlet* has puzzled many readers. While some, like Ian Jack may suggest that it is simply a response to 'formal' boredom, it can also be read as a radically challenging deconstruction of identity on several levels.<sup>46</sup> The opening of the novel, as in *Waverley*, seems to promise an oppositional framework, for structured in the form of letters between Alan and Darsie, it appears to set up a familiar dialectic between the rational and the romantic. Such is the interpretation provided at least by Alan, who sees himself as a lawyer and a man of the Enlightenment and Darsie as the dreamer, educated on novels, and with a head 'filled with romance'.

*Redgauntlet* soon becomes, however, a study of this formulation's inadequacy, for as Darsie himself recognises, neither he nor Alan can be described in these totalising terms:



'Why, what a pair of prigs hast thou made of us! - I plunging into scrapes, without having courage to get out of them - thy sagacious self, afraid to put one foot before the other lest it should run away from its companion, and so standing like a post, out of mere faintness and coldness of heart, while all the world were driving full speed past thee. Thou a portrait-painter! - I tell thee, Alan, I have seen a better seated on the fourth round of a ladder, and painting a bare-breeched Highlander, holding a pint-stoup as big as himself, and a booted Lowlander in a bob-wig, supporting a glass of like dimensions; the whole being designed to represent the sign of the salutation.(p.28)

This position, incorporating rather, a slippage of the forces of reason and emotion, romance and realism, is one which is supported structurally by the novel. *Redgauntlet* is a study of both Alan's need to recognise the forces of emotion and 'romance' as part of his own identity and experience, and Darsie's acknowledgement that such forces - forming what Kristeva would describe as the 'semiotic' - belong not only to the realms of story, but form part of his own character and a potent historical and ideological force.

For Alan, self-discovery involves the recognition that emotion cannot entirely be silenced or subjugated. 'You go in search of adventures', he tells Darsie, but he is also forced to admit that 'adventures come to me unsought for'(p.86). As a result of these adventures, he is also forced to admit that his rational and abstract categories for judging human experience may be inadequate. Certainly this is so when he meets Charles Edward, for he discovers that his framework for assessing the Catholic faith is hard to reconcile with his actual experience of 'Father Buonaventure':

Fairford, upon his departure, felt himself much at a loss what course to pursue. His line of education, as well as his father's tenets in matters of church and state, had taught him a holy horror for Papists, and a devout belief in whatever had been said of the punic faith of Jesuits, and of the expedients of mental reservation, by which the Catholic priests in general were supposed to avoid keeping faith with heretics. Yet there was something of majesty, depressed indeed, and overclouded, but still grand and imposing, in the manner and words of Father Buonaventure, which it was difficult to reconcile with those preconceived opinions which imputed subtlety and fraud to his sect and order.(p.339)

For Alan, such experiences are unsettling, even disruptive ones, for they suggest that



there may be times where the rational self cannot be divorced from the emotional. This discovery leads to his flight from court to go to the aid of his friend Darsie, for love for that companion clearly over-rides his better 'reason'. Nor is it a decision which Alan regrets, for while it leads him certainly to 'wild adventures', and into the company of the most ambivalent of characters, it also leads to his swift marriage to the romantic Greenmantle, and the embracing of an emotional aspect of himself - the *differance* - which he had hitherto sought to negate or avoid.

The lessons which Darsie learns are more complex, but he too is forced to acknowledge that the identity he seeks cannot be construed simplistically.<sup>47</sup> Like Waverley, Darsie begins the novel with a good grasp of the romance genre, for his youth also has been spent reading novels. Again, like Waverley, such material is divorced from Darsie's image of 'real' identity, for he mocks romantic images of Scotland, certain that his destiny lies outside of it. He too, however, is forced to acknowledge that those forces like Jacobitism which he had safely silenced or consigned to the realms of story may form a more important force in British politics, the 'real' than he had hitherto imagined:

Methought I could now form some guess at the character of Mr Herries, upon whose name and situation the whole late scene had thrown considerable light; - one of those fanatical Jacobites, doubtless, whose arms, not twenty years since, had shaken the British throne, and some of whom, though their party daily diminished in numbers, energy and power, retained still an inclination to renew the attempt they had found so desperate. He was indeed perfectly different from the sort of zealous Jacobites whom it had been my luck hitherto to meet with. Old ladies of family over their hyson, and grey-haired lairds over their punch, I had often heard utter a little harmless treason; while the former remembered having led down a dance with the Chevalier, and the latter recounted the feats they had performed at Preston, Clifton and Falkirk.(p.229)

Redgauntlet's enterprise amounts to more than 'a little harmless treason', however, and Darsie is forced to acknowledge it as part of an on-going and so inherently multiplistic and fluid British identity. Far from being detached from real experience, such forces are intrinsically bound within Darsie's heritage, his wider *identity*. Descended from the mysterious house of Redgauntlet, with all that this implies,

Darsie can no longer dismiss 'romantic' forces, but must recognise them as a vital part of himself. As Darsie at last encounters his own newly found identity in the mirror, it is only to discover the stamp of these forces inescapably upon his forehead:

Strange as it may seem, a thrill of awe, which shot across my mind at that instant, was not unmingled with a wild and mysterious feeling of wonder, almost amounting to pleasure. I remembered the reflection of my own face in the mirror, at one striking moment during the singular interview of that day, and I hastened to the outward apartment to consult a glass which hung there, whether it were possible for my countenance to be again contorted into the peculiar frown which so much resembled the terrific look of Herries.(p.231)

The discovery of the secrets of Darsie's identity imply that the romantic or semiotic cannot be a force easily silenced, but must be acknowledged as part of one's self. Such a discovery, consequently, involves a rewriting of his own character, and the adoption of a new name. More importantly, it suggests that while the Jacobite and romantic path may not be one he eventually chooses to follow, it must be recognised as a very real force in any construction of the self. To attempt to subvert or negate aspects of the personality by reason alone is, as Joshua Geddes illustrates, impossible, for the 'Old Adam' will reassert itself. Similarly, it is impossible to ignore those emotional aspects of the self which appear to undercut reason. Darsie, finally, must acknowledge these ambiguous forces within himself, and incorporate them in his image of his new identity:

His situation in society was changed from that of a wandering, unowned youth, in whom none appeared to take an interest, excepting the strangers by whom he had been educated, to the heir of a noble house, possessed of such influence and such property, that it seemed as if the progress or arrest of important political events were likely to depend upon his resolution.(p.372)

Whole identity, the novel suggests, must involve a recognition of the importance of both rational and emotional, semiological and semiotic, aspects, and an acknowledgement of the place of both in any construction of identity. It is, consequently, only once Alan and Darsie begin to acknowledge the importance of both these forces that the novel's structure may come together into any omniscient narrative.

Before this point narrative is necessarily partial or one-sided, consisting only of one point of view, and, as a model of experience, inadequate. Once the importance of these forces begins to be acknowledged by the two young men the narrative oppositions collapse in upon themselves, suggesting that a model of binary opposition is necessarily artificial. Structure thus reflects plot as it moves from a split binary position to a more flexible model which suggests that these apparently contradictory forces are both elided and ambiguous.

This is also implied by the conclusion of the novel where the tensions between romance and rationality, Jacobite and Loyalist remain at play with each other, each refusing to be silenced as final conclusion is once again deferred and evaded. While in any practical or reasonable sense Jacobitism may be defeated at the end of the novel, its emotional appeal is persistent, and while Charles Edward and Redgauntlet may finally leave the shores of Scotland, they leave behind them tensions which refuse to become fixed or settled. The closing pages of *Redgauntlet* express such paradox, building into their very language the refusal of these forces to be reconciled and negated. In the closing pages, such ambiguity is expressed by the variety of names used both for Redgauntlet, and for Charles Edward. Names, Scott was well aware, are not impartial, but carry with them clusters of interpretation. Such an awareness is apparent in the equivocation over the title of *Waverley*, *Redgauntlet* itself, and, as the manuscript shows, over the name 'Alan Fairford'.<sup>48</sup> In the closing pages of *Redgauntlet*, similarly, the various names used carry with them different attitudes to the novel's conclusion. Names have been important throughout the novel, and here, General Campbell, by referring to his hero first by the commonplace 'Ingoldsby', and then by the heroic 'Redgauntlet', expresses the twin aspects of his failed enterprise. Similarly equivocal attitudes surround the names given for the Prince, for he is described as 'the unhappy Adventurer', and 'the Prince', both 'the unfortunate Charles Edward', and the 'Chevalier'(p.443). Such nomenclature is unsettling, for it provides different and ambiguously slippery interpretations of the narrator's attitude to the failed rebellion, incorporating both sympathy and thanks for the end of Jacobitism.

Therefore, while Jacobitism may at the end of the novel be consigned to the realms of emotion the novel has shown that emotion cannot simply be dismissed to the category of 'memory and nostalgia', and should not be silenced. Emotion, therefore, proves to be a quietly but persistently subversive force in any image of Scottish identity, constantly reasserting itself 'in excess' to such a construction. The conclusion of *Redgauntlet* marks not the symbolic 'death' of Scotland, but an acknowledgement that while reason may finally be chosen as the path to follow, forces as potent as an emotional attachment to the Jacobite rebellion cannot simply be silenced:

The last heir of the Stuarts leant on Redgauntlet's arm as they walked towards the beach; for the ground was rough, and he no longer possessed the elasticity of limb and of spirit which had, twenty years before, carried him over many a Highland hill, as light as one of their native deer. His adherents followed, looking on the ground, their feelings struggling against the dictates of their reason.(p.444)

On the contrary, they form the potent and dislocative *différance* in Scottish identity, which serves to defer and 'shake' any final or total image of her.

*Redgauntlet* emerges then as an unsettling novel both in theme and structure, for it refuses to posit both national and personal identity in any essential terms but, on the contrary, gives voice to those aspects of experience which are 'in excess' of such a model. These semiotic aspects of experience, *Redgauntlet* suggests, are ones which cannot be silenced or dismissed, cannot be assigned to some 'safe' category of story, but must be acknowledged as a real and potent part the wider 'narrative', or 'text' of lived experience. To suggest as much is to acknowledge a radical position, for it incorporates a fundamental refusal to offer a fixed ontology of national or personal 'reality'.

Such a radical position in *Redgauntlet* is one supported by the fact that the proposed third Jacobite rebellion which forms the basis of its content is, in fact a creation of

Scott's imagination. Jacobite material used elsewhere in Scott's work is at least to some extent based on historical reality and such a reassertion of Jacobitism in this fictional context appears to suggest a desire on the part of Scott to reinforce the importance of the emotional appeal of Jacobitism as a practical force in Scottish identity. While traditional constructions of history may seek to 'write out' such emotional forces, Scott shows a reluctance to adopt this pattern. Identity in the novel is something 'written', for both Alan and Darsie rediscover their new identities by writing the letters and journals through which they reconstruct their personal histories. Similarly, the novel suggests that a new history of Scotland, and one which recognises the importance of the 'subversive', emotional appeal of Jacobitism, may be written within the pages of *Redgauntlet*.

'History' is, as Linda Hutcheon describes in her study of postmodernism one of the grand-narratives to come under attack in the post-structuralist period.<sup>49</sup> Its claim to give access to a true record of the past has been discredited, and its status undermined by the postmodern assault on empiricism. 'There are no facts, only interpretations', Nietzsche informs us, an understanding which obviously renders problematic the broadly post-Enlightenment distinction between history and story, forcing it rather, into elision, replacing such an opposition with the understanding that while different types of narration may be in operation, all must be recognised as non-total forms, as *discourses*, by which we construct various models of the world.<sup>50</sup>

Such an understanding of history is then, very different from that which existed in the early nineteenth century. History was, indeed, one of the favoured forms of the Enlightenment, for the emphasis which had been placed on empiricism suggested that the recording of historical facts would offer a clear picture of the past. Hugh Blair, writing in the middle of the eighteenth century had suggested that 'the general idea of history is a record of truth for the instruction of mankind', and such notions were typical implying that 'truth' - straightforward and unproblematic - could be discerned by the recording of historical detail.<sup>51</sup> Such a notion underlies much nineteenth century historical writing including Scott's own *Life of Napoleon Bonaparte*, which



by its very length suggests that if enough information is recorded, truth will eventually be arrived upon. A similar assumption also lies behind the biography of Scott provided by Lockhart, for again, sufficient length is given as authority for claiming to provide an authentic picture.<sup>52</sup>

It seems, however, as if Scott was not entirely satisfied with this empirical approach to history, but was in fact aware of the possibilities inherent in a merging of the categories of history and story. In his article on 'Romance' for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Scott suggests a tellingly ambiguous approach to history, intimating that the distinction between historical writing and story may not be so distinct as the empiricist approach suggests. On the contrary, he proposes that romance and history may have had the same origins, and claims that romance might 'be said to embrace or, infine, the mythological and fabulous history of all early nations.'<sup>53</sup> Scotland's history too, he suggests, might be compiled from her ballads and legends, and while he realised that such a construction of the past would be a curious one, it offers an important and suggestive insight into his own understanding of a somewhat ambiguous, and less authoritative aspect of historical discourse.

Such an assault on a simple faith in the empiricist approach to history is, in fact, the subject of *The Antiquary*. Determined to discover the authentic site of battles and etymology of the language, the Antiquary's approach, his episteme, is essentially empiricist. Such empiricism is, however, mocked in the novel, as Scott parodies his own love of ancient Scottish history and relics. This approach, the novel suggests, is more or less redundant, for the details of the past can never precisely be rediscovered, and the attempt to do so may be misleading. Certainly, this is the case for the Antiquary himself, for as he interprets the remains on his own land as evidence for the site of the battle of Mons Grampius, Edie Ochiltree, the voice of common sense and sagacity in the novel ironically comments that 'he minds the bigging' of the monument, which, he claims was little more than a sheep pen(p.41). Empiricism is thus humorously discredited. More significantly, Scott suggests that the attempt to discover the empirical truth about the past may also be divisive. As Sir Arthur and

The Antiquary each try to gain credence for their own interpretation of history, each refuses to give way to the other, believing only one construction of the past to be possible. This behaviour nearly costs them their friendship, and provokes a quarrel which to Lovel and the reader seems ridiculous:

'The Piks, or Picts', said Lovel, 'must have been singularly poor in dialect, since, in the only remaining word of the vocabulary, and that consisting only of two syllables, they have been confessedly obliged to borrow one of them from another language; and methinks, gentlemen, with submission, the controversy is not unlike that which the two knights fought, concerning the shield that had one side white and the other black. Each of you claim one-half of the word, and seem to resign the other. But what strikes me most, is the poverty of the language which has left such slight vestiges behind it.'(p.62)

Such arguments, Lovel suggests, are necessarily reductive, for the plain facts can never be arrived upon, but only different interpretations, each offering some aspect of the truth.

It is not surprising, then, that elsewhere in his fiction, Scott should challenge the empirical approach to both history and the 'truth', and undermine the binary distinction between history and story, fact and interpretation. Rather than consigning Scottish identity to the realm of story Scott seeks to unsettle the relationship between writing and history, suggesting that our interpretations of the past may only consist of a variety of different discourses.

Brian McHale, in his study *Postmodernist Fiction*, explores the difference which, he claims, can be identified between 'traditional' historical fiction and works like those by E.H.Thomas and E.L.Doctorow which exhibit a 'postmodern' approach to the past:

All historical novels, even the most traditional, typically involve some violation of ontological boundaries. Traditional historical novels strive to suppress these violations, to hide the ontological 'seams' between fictional projections and real-world facts. They do so by tactfully avoiding contradictions between their versions of historical figures and the familiar facts of these figure's careers, and by making the background norms governing their projected worlds conform to accepted real world norms.<sup>54</sup>



Scott, however, rather than 'hiding the ontological seams' is determined to strain them, not only creating contradictions between his projected world, and 'accepted real world norms', but frequently drawing the reader's attention to them.

Such a strategy is closely related to Scott's more familiar unease with the opposition between 'romance' and 'reality', for he repeatedly challenges the alignment of romantic elements with story, and their opposition to rationality, empiricism and history. In the 'Postscript' to *Waverley*, he suggests that more complex relationships may exist between these concepts for, paradoxically, it is those elements construed as 'romantic' which have been drawn most accurately from 'fact':

I have embodied in imaginary scenes, and ascribed to fictitious characters, a part of the incidents which I then received from those who were actors in them. Indeed, the most romantic parts of this narrative are precisely those which have a foundation in fact.(p.448)

In such a statement, Scott is challenging the polarising of romance and history, story and narrative, suggesting that at any time these categories may dissolve or elide.

This a challenge is also implicit in the notes, footnotes and prefaces of the 'Magnum Opus' edition of the *Waverley* novels. In her article 'Voices and Text: Scott the Story teller, Scott the Novelist', Marilyn Orr suggests that these notes, appearing just at the point when Scott's authorship is revealed, display a reluctance to pin down the text into the fixed form of narrative as opposed to the more fluid and flexible form of oral story.<sup>55</sup> Those narrative structures and strategies contained in the notes and preface support her argument for they also show a desire to defer meaning, thus resisting formal closure. This method again suggests then, that historical writing is not a fixed or empirical project, but, on the contrary, something fluid and ambiguous. The notes and prefaces of the *Waverley* novels form, it has been proposed a major historical work in themselves, and are one of Scott's major achievements. To see them as such, however, is partly to misconstrue them, for their place is in relation to the novels, forming an integral part of the narrative and serving to deconstruct the traditional oppositions between history and story, romance and reality.

The history of Helen Walker which Scott provides in the introduction to the 1830 edition of *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* is in this respect typical. Scott spends much time in this introduction outlining the historical background which, he claims, forms the inspiration and the basis of the novel. The only purpose of this lengthy account, however, seems to be to highlight the alterations which Scott makes in his own fiction. *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* suggests levels of ambiguity and cultural significance far removed from Helen Walker's story, and Jeanie Deans's fate may be regarded as almost directly contradictory to it. In his introduction Scott implies an ironic awareness of the disparity which results from the changes he has made:

Nor is there much occasion to repeat how much the author conceives himself obliged to his unknown correspondent, who thus supplied him with a theme affording such a pleasing view of the moral dignity of virtue, though unaided by birth, beauty or talent -If the picture has suffered in the execution, it is from the failure of the author's powers to present in detail the same simple and striking portrait exhibited in Mrs Goldie's letters.(p.8)

Similar assaults on the opposition between history and story are also recurrent in Scott's notes which simultaneously both promote that normally construed as fictional, and undermine material which appears to belong firmly in the realms of the actual or historical. In *Old Mortality*, for example, Scott adds a note describing the historical character of Francis Stewart, Earl of Bothwell.<sup>56</sup> The account he gives is, again, substantially at odds with the fictional life he is given in the novel. Rather than 'silencing' this disruptive element, however, Scott allows it to erupt into the text, thus undermining any total authority in his own narrative. 'The character of Bothwell', he explicitly states, 'except in relation to the name, is entirely ideal'(p.426). Elsewhere notes are used to demonstrate disparities between fictional and historical realities, as for example, here, where Scott describes the sound of kettle drums at night, and reflexively comments:

Regimental music is never played at night. But who can assure us that such was not the custom in Charles the Second's time? Till I am well informed on this point, the kettle drums shall clash on, as adding

History is, Scott suggests, only our imaginative reconstruction of it, and the boundaries between it and fiction, narrative and story, may be ones which at certain points begin to disintegrate.

Such reflexivity as is found in these comments and notes in Scott's fiction clearly serve to undercut the absolute authority and empiricism of his narrative then, and suggests that those constructions of the past given the status of 'history' may, like those described as 'fiction', be only partial and fictive interpretations of it. Notes and prefaces operate not only to substantiate and undermine that which appears to hold historical authority, but also to project into the 'reality' framework observations apparently 'in excess' of our expectations of it. Elements from what appear to be the accepted realms of romance and story are, as part of this strategy, subversively substantiated by the overtly 'empiricist' notes to the text, Lillas Redgauntlet providing a typical example. Lillas, in what could be defined as a truly romantic gesture, and one belonging, we might imagine clearly to the realms of fiction, reveals to her brother "'five blood specks on my arm by which mysterious nature has impressed, on an unborn infant, a record of its father's violent death and its mother's miseries'". Rather than undercutting this apparent retreat into the world of legend, however, Scott adds a footnote which appears to substantiate it:

Several persons have brought down to these days the impressions which Nature has thus recorded, when they were yet babes unborn. One lady of quality, whose father was long under sentence of death, previous to the Rebellion, was marked on the back of the neck by the sign of a broad axe. Another, whose kinsman had been slain in battle, and died on the scaffold, to the number of seven, bore a child spattered on the right shoulder, and down the arm, with scarlet drops, as if of blood. Many other instances might be quoted.(p.357)

Such interpolations are obviously disruptive, are 'in excess' of any total system in the novel, for they unsettle our generic expectations by confusing the categories of 'romance' - that which deals with the extraordinary - and of 'realism' - that which

deals with the ordinary and verifiable train of events. So, too, they elide the distinction between romance and realism which we have already seen begin to disintegrate in Scott's fiction, and its ontological alignment according to the categories of story and history, fiction and narrative. As a result, the very ontologies of these categories are questioned, suggesting that an empirical approach to history must be replaced by one which recognises its far closer relationship, as *discourse* with story and fiction.

The postmodern understanding of our constructions of our selves, of the past, and of the world around us as discourses or meta-narratives arises, of course, from the reflexive awareness that there is no point beyond language from which we can comment on the world around us. Language is seen as a dissembling medium, for while it constantly strives to achieve such 'presence', it is always partial by nature, operating by the slippage and elisions between terms. Such partiality is in turn disguised by the impulse within language to paper over or silence those aspects of itself which resist totality. While our constructions of the world in language may thus appear to be absolute ones, therefore, they contain always within them the seeds of their own deconstruction.<sup>58</sup>

Scott's own understanding of the dissolving of the boundaries between history and story results less from such a self-consciously conceptual position than from his experiences of Scottish culture and history, but nevertheless, such experience involved a suggestively similar recognition of the way in which reality and history might be shaped by our linguistic constructions of it. David Hewitt, observing the way in which Scott questions traditional definitions of historical narrative, suggests that his attempts to unsettle empiricism result from an unease with the way in which form could determine a linguistic or narrative message, and a desire to work out the relationship between the concept of empirical truth and the linguistic medium:

Literature illustrates history, and history illustrates literature; writing is laid down in layers, comment commenting on commentary. The

provision of such varied evidence, presented in such a complex way, and in each case over many years, implies that he is never absolutely confident that truth can be captured in a particular form of words; it is as though he were constantly trying to work out the relationship of the literary artifact to what it conveys.<sup>59</sup>

It is hardly surprising then, that Scott should use his notes and prefaces to unsettle the authoritarian nature of his narrative, for he was aware of the ways in which language could be used to distort as well as reveal, and uses such strategies to undercut the totalising impulses in his own construction of Scotland's past and Scottish identity. The ways in which language serves to create our interpretations of reality is also, however, a subject which, in relation to Scotland's past at least, he explores at a thematic level.

Near the opening of *Redgauntlet*, for instance, Darsie Latimer recounts his understanding of the Jacobite situation, suggesting that it is in every respect, a dead and forgotten issue:

The Pretender is no more remembered in the Highlands than if the poor gentleman were gathered to his hundred and eight fathers, whose portraits adorn the ancient walls of Holyrood; the broad swords have passed into other hands; the targets are used to cover the butter-churns; and the race has sunk, or is fast sinking, from ruffling bullies into tame cheaters.(p.30)

His understanding is, he claims, the 'true' one, but it is one which is challenged in the novel. In spite of its apparently 'total' nature, then, such a discourse can be questioned and may, his uncle suggests, be only a form of government rhetoric, which seeks to silence the voices of discontent and disruption which threaten it. The British situation, he proposes, is in reality far less peaceful:

Listen to me, my dearest Arthur. The state of this nation no more implies prosperity, than the florid colour of a feverish patient is a symptom of health. All is false and hollow. The apparent success of Clatham's administration has plunged the country deeper in debt than all the barren acres of Canada are worth, were they as fertile as Yorkshire - the dazzling lustre of the victories of Miden and Quebec have been dimmed by the disgrace of the hasty peace - by the war, England, at immense expense, gained nothing but honour, and that she

While Redgauntlet's words may also be a distorted discourse, they are unsettling, for they suggest that language may be used not only to give access to the truth, but to shape our understanding of it.

This reflexive tone runs throughout Scott's fiction in its demonstrations of an acute understanding of the ways in which reality, or at least our images of it, may be constructed through language. The reasons for Scott's reflexive acuteness cannot, of course, be finally explained, for it is not a subject upon which he directly comments, but there may be aspects of the Scottish situation which in part account for it.

Among them is the role of the study of rhetoric in the Scottish education system. The study of rhetoric has long been an established feature of this system, particularly in Edinburgh where in 1759 Hugh Blair was made the university's first professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres. His collected lectures, published in 1767, offer an important insight into the way in which language and discourse were perceived by those immersed in the traditions of the Enlightenment. For Blair, there is no question but that language offers a window into the 'true' understanding of the world, the implication being that those who can best handle language will be most able to proceed within it. Cultivation of language is thus regarded as in accord with cultivation of reason, the process by which the world is seen to operate:

For I must be allowed to say, that when we are employed after a proper manner, in the study of composition, we are cultivating reason itself. True rhetoric and sound logic are very nearly allied. The study of arranging and expressing our thoughts with propriety, teaches to think, as well as to speak accurately. By putting our sentiments into words we always conceive them more distinctly.<sup>60</sup>

Blair's justification for the use and study of rhetoric cloaks several problematics, however, not least the fact that if language may be used to manipulate it may also be used to falsify. This conclusion is, as one might expect, one which Blair tries to 'paper over', or silence, dismissing the problems by it through suggesting that *good*



writing or rhetoric can only be produced by the 'virtuous'. Rhetoric in the hands of the unvirtuous, on the other hand, will be recognised immediately as 'artifice, as trick, as the play only of speech; and viewed in this light, whom can it persuade?'.<sup>61</sup> By such argument, Blair concludes that good truth will create good rhetoric, and that sound rhetoric, by implication, can be equated with real truth.

However Blair may attempt to deny the implications of his own study of the uses of rhetoric, however, it is clear that he has perceived that language, if used effectively, may be used to manipulate, and that this may not always be to 'virtuous' ends. Such an acute understanding of the devices by which language may control and manipulate - and Blair's lecture series runs to three volumes - could scarcely have failed to alert those like Scott, educated in its traditions, of the ways in which language not only reveals, but to some extent shapes, our experiences.

For Scott, this understanding could only have been heightened by his legal training. Scott's relationship with the legal profession has been well documented by John Chisholm in his study *Sir Walter Scott as a Judge*.<sup>62</sup> The role of the legal profession in Scott's fiction is, however, commonly interpreted as a source of rationality, providing a force of order, restraint and reason. To some extent, such an interpretation is justified, for certainly characters like Mr Fairford senior seem to offer stability, rationality, and a fixed set of standards by which to interpret experience.

The legal profession may also have contributed, however, to Scott's reflexively orientated understanding of the ways in which language can be used to shape the world and to silence information which is 'in excess' of particular interpretations of it. So too, Scott's role as a judge may have contributed to his recognition of the inadequacy of binary oppositions, for as *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* at least suggests, the world does not fall into such easy categories as 'guilty' or 'innocent'. Certainly, the legal profession as it is portrayed in Scott's fiction seems, in the language it employs, far more a force towards shaping reality than elucidating it, for as the case of Peter Peebles in *Redgauntlet* suggests, the law does not give access to the truth, but serves only to distort and complicate it:



'There is the original action of Peebles v Plainstones, convening him for payment of £.3000, less or more, as alleged ballance due by Plainstones. 2ndly, There is a counter-action in which Plainstones is pursuer and Peebles defender, for £.2500, less or more, being ballance alleged *per contra*, to be due by Peebles. 3rdly, Mr Peebles seventh agent advised an action of Compt and Reckoning at his instance, wherein what balance should prove due on either side might be fairly struck and ascertained. 4thly, To meet the hypothetical case, that Peebles might be found liable in a balance to Plainstones, Mr Wildgoose, Mr Peebles eighth agent, recommended a Multipoleinding, to bring all parties concerned into the field.'(p.153)

'Wildgoose', seems a fit agent for the case, for it is clear here at least that the legal system and the language which it employs will never lead to an elucidation of the truth, but only serve to obscure it. Truth becomes in this context, as Alan points out, as confusing and elusive as 'a nest of chip boxes', and an attempt to fix it as essence or absolute may lead, as it does for Peter Peebles, to madness.

It is easy to see how, then, if Scott's experiences of the law and the language by which it operates at all resembled Peter Peeble's, how knowledge of the legal system could have contributed to his understanding of the way in which language may distort and manipulate reality rather than give a transparent form of access to it. It also emerges in his fiction, however, that this understanding results too from his experiences of the Scottish political and historical situation.

Again this is suggested by *Redgauntlet*, for the conflicting forces which refuse to be reconciled at its conclusion are ones shaped and expressed through linguistic interpretation. In the closing scenes, as previously mentioned, characters are identified by a series of different names - Redgauntlet, Ingoldsby, The Adventurer, the unhappy adventurer, the last heir of the Stuart - each defined by subtle shifts of language, and of course, implying different attitudes towards the failed Jacobite rebellion. Names, as this closing paragraph suggests, are not neutral, but acquire meaning by virtue of our understanding of the concepts which gather around them, by the slippage between terms, which denies the possibility of a language free from interpretation.

Reality in *Redgauntlet* is, consequently, portrayed as inseparable from our

linguistic constructions of it, for as Mr Fairford diplomatically appreciates, our political interpretations and ideas about reality may be revealed in our use of language. Language is not a neutral entity, not a 'degree zero', but a matter of linguistic interpretation, as the following rhyme discovered by Darsie at the bottom of a Jacobite drinking vessel very neatly serves to indicate:<sup>63</sup>

God Bless the King! - God Bless the Faith's defender!  
God Bless - No harm in blessing the Pretender.  
Who that Pretender is, and who that King, -  
God Bless us all! - is quite another thing.(p.228)

The answer to the riddle is, of course, a question of political perspective, based on no possible absolute, but entirely on interpretation, and grounded in whichever linguistic matrix we may find ourselves operating within.

In *Redgauntlet*, then, Scott explores the way in which the Jacobite rebellion reveals linguistic incongruities and disruptions, suggesting that reality may not be a fixed entity, but something we create through our constructions of it in language. This is a path which he further pursues in *Old Mortality*, where Scotland's religious history is shown to confirm the ways in which political and religious positions manipulate our understanding of the world through their uses of discourse. In *Old Mortality*, reality - or at least our linguistic experiences of it - are again presented not as a total system, but as a shifting model of interpretation which changes along with political manipulation and development. The novel embodies an exploration of the ways in which even the most simple terms like 'authority' and 'rebel' silence the host of semiological ambiguities which lie beneath them and which in the face of lived experience constantly erupt out of such neat packages.

The theme is explored by once again setting up a series of binary oppositions with Henry Morton on the one side, Claverhouse on the other. These positions too, can be equated with the terms rebel and loyalist, and Morton's subsequent fate determined by his rebellious position within this framework. At the conclusion of the novel, however, when he returns to Scotland resolved to adhere to the status quo, it is only to discover that the 'game-rules' have been altered, and that he now finds himself in the

'loyalist' position.<sup>64</sup> Claverhouse, however, who commands such respect and authority in the earlier parts of the novel, is now posited under the term 'rebel', with significantly a change of name to accompany it:

'Country?', replied Cuddie. 'Ou, the country's weel eneugh, an it werena that dour deevil Claver'se (they ca' him Dundee now), that's stirring abut yet in the Highlands, they say, wi' a' the Donalds, and Duncans, and Dugalds, that ever wore bottomless breeks, driving about wi' him, to set things asteer again, now that we hae gotten them a' reasonably weel settled. But Mackay will pit him down, there's little doubt o' that; he'll gie him his fairing, I'll be caution for it.'(p.350)

Within such a political framework, it is clear that words like 'authority', 'government' and 'rebel' can no longer be seen as representing any kind of totality, but are, on the contrary, indicative of a process of deferral, where meaning is constantly evaded and interpreted by the matrix, the field of play in which the discourse is operating.

The exploration of the ambiguous and slippery nature of language which Scott offers in his fiction constantly suggests his understanding of the way in which language may be used to create false notions of reality, and, indeed, of the ways in which lived experience constantly pushes against the neatness of our linguistic constructions of it. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that in his own writing he should seek to avoid positing such false totalising systems or absolute constructions of Scottish history and identity by continually undermining and disrupting the authority of its own narratives. The notes which Scott employs in the 'Magnum Opus' edition of the *Waverley* novels, as already suggested, clearly form an important part of this strategy but at the very heart of it, lies Scott's reluctance to admit *authorship* of the novels, and the system of disguises, games and intrigues which he incorporates into his fiction in order to evade discovery.

The authorship of the *Waverley* novels was, until Scott's bankruptcy in 1826 forced acknowledgement of them, an ambiguous and problematic question, seemingly reflecting a desire to evade and postpone authority and final meaning, replacing it by a

process of deferral, play and evasion. While the reasons for such anonymity with *Waverley* may be understandable, Scott's persistence with this strategy is curious, and seems to reflect a desire to evade authority, final interpretation, and closure into any kind of fixed system.

Roland Barthes in his essay 'The Death of the Author', argues of course that post-structuralist views of language similarly displace, even destroy the authority of the author, cutting his text free from intentionality, and placing the reader in the role of 'producer' of the text:

Classic criticism has never paid any attention to the reader; for it, the writer, is the only person in literature. We are now beginning to let ourselves be fooled no longer by the arrogant antiphrastical recriminations of good society in favour of the very thing it sets aside, ignores, smothers, or destroys; we know that to give writing its future it is necessary to overthrow the myth; the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author.<sup>65</sup>

Postmodernist fiction, in an attempt to acknowledge this loss of authority, employs a variety of game like and evading strategies by which it is dissipated, and any final or conclusive form of meaning or interpretation postponed.

Scott, attempting to explain his own employment of similarly reflexive strategies, can only suggest that it was like 'a game at bo-peep', and that he can account for it by no reason but a love of concealment and game-playing:

If I am asked further reasons for the conduct I have long observed, I can only resort to the explanation supplied by a critic as friendly as he is intelligent; namely, that the mental organization of the Novelist must be characterised, to speak craniologically, by an extraordinary development of the passion for delitescency! I the rather suspect some natural disposition of this kind, for, from the instant I perceived the extreme curiosity manifested on the subject, I felt a secret satisfaction in baffling it, for which, when its unimportance is considered, I do not well know how to account.<sup>66</sup>

Certainly, a love of 'delitescency' is manifest in Scott's texts. Yet while he fiercely defended his anonymity, he simultaneously exhibited an obvious love of teasing his reader with the secret of it. A reference to himself in *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, where

a young advocate suggests that 'seniors at the bar, within the bar, and even on the bench, read novels; and, if not belied, some of them have written novels into the bargain', is, in this respect, typical, for it shows a love of reflexively playing with the reader(p.20).

In the postmodern period, such game playing within the work of fiction can be interpreted in the light of Ludwig Wittgenstein's game analogies where, it is suggested, language proceeds by rules worked out between the players. This reflexive understanding of communication undermines the claim of language to be totalising, of course, and thus removes from discourse the right of authority or absolute interpretation. Scott's use of game seems to incorporate a very similar desire to deprive his narratives of absolute authority, suggesting that they are ambiguous entities, open to flexible models of interpretation.

Such a reading is certainly substantiated by Scott's later treatment of the *Waverley* novels, for, as Marilyn Orr points out, Scott's acknowledgement of his works of fiction - his claim for authority - is immediately accompanied by the attempt to undercut it with the layers of notes and prefaces which he offers for the 'Magnum Opus' edition. His anonymity, this would suggest, is convenient for Scott, providing him with the opportunity to evade authority and surround his texts with layers of embedding. Thomas Crawford elaborates, attempting to explain the reasons for Scott's well kept secret:

Scott's motives were certainly mixed: the remnants of a snobbish feeling that novel-writing was not a suitable occupation for a gentleman; an apparent diffidence masking a morbid sensitivity to criticism; appreciation of the value of mystery as a publicity device; a shrewd estimate that if all the novels were unequivocally presented to the public as the work of a single man, they would be immediately dismissed as hurriedly produced pot-boilers; a mischievous love of anonymity for its own sake; and finally, the psychological need for a *persona* and the artistic desirability of a formal frame within which the novel could be enclosed.<sup>67</sup>

Such embedding offers the opportunity to surround his texts with layers of narrating personae, disguises, fictional authors and authorities - levels of play which, we should

note, he makes no attempt to remove after the ostensible reason for their existence disappears in 1826.

*The Heart of Mid-Lothian* offers a consummate example of such embedding, for the construction of the novel is a complex one, involving layer upon layer of levels of authority as the text is mediated through the hands of Jedediah Cleishbotham, who in turn claims only to be the transmitter of manuscripts provided by Peter Pattieson. Inspiration for them is removed to yet another level, coming, we are told, with another playful stroke from Scott, from a young advocate. Authority is further eroded, and final meaning ever more deferred, as we become aware that Cleishbotham is hardly the most reliable of narrators, claiming, rather equivocally in *Old Mortality*, that he is 'not in one single iota, answerable for their contents, more or less'(p.2).

*The Heart of Mid-Lothian* is typical of Scott's early and major fiction in this evasive reluctance to align narratorial authority with any one specific source. The evasion becomes all the more acute when we realise the playful co-relation of Scott's narrating personae standing in a dubious and fearful relationship - if we are to believe the 'Introductory Epistle' to *The Fortunes of Nigel* - with the master trickster and co-ordinator himself - 'The Great Unknown', or the 'Wizard of the North'.<sup>68</sup> Within such systems, both authority and fixed meaning are subverted and deferred, as each attempt to unravel them becomes defeated, passed on to another level of play. As a result, discourse itself and the ontological perspectives which it offers becomes ambiguous, refusing to be fixed into any final or stable form.

Such a challenge is again, reflected in the structural non-closure equally characteristic of Scott's fiction. His reluctance to resolve the thematic forces which he has described in his novels is, as we have seen, unsettling, for it leaves announced those voices which more total systems of discourse would seek to silence. A correlative pattern is also reflected in Scott's work at a structural level, where again, the impulse towards fixed meaning and interpretation is repeatedly evaded or dissipated. This non-closure is, he recognises in *The Fortunes of Nigel*, a source of contemporary



criticism, but justification for it can he maintains be found amongst his fictional predecessors. They, he concludes, provide plot not for the sake of final conclusion but for the delights to be met along the way:

These great masters have been satisfied if they amused the reader upon the road; though the conclusion only arrived because the tale must have an end, just as the traveller alights at the inn because it is evening.<sup>69</sup>

Such a justification interestingly anticipates R.L. Stevenson's delight in 'travelling hopefully', and like that aesthetic, reflects a challenge at every level to fixed meaning in the text, and a desire to continually defer its closures.<sup>70</sup>

Conclusions, when they are provided by Scott are therefore highly ambiguous, refusing to settle at any point of rest and frequently belonging not to narrative proper but to the letters, postscripts and afterwards by which narrative is dissipated. In *Rob Roy* for instance, while the first person narrative itself ends somewhat ambiguously, with Andrew Fairservice's comment on *Rob Roy*, conclusion is further deferred and evaded by the postscript. Rather than coming to any final point of rest, far less resolution, narrative is dissipated into a number of strands which 'fray' rather than 'bind' into a totalising impulse. Similar strategies appear throughout Scott's fiction, seemingly serving, as Cleishbotham suggests in *Old Mortality*, 'to wave the task of a concluding chapter', the task of closure(p.419). In this novel, conclusion is replaced by a conversation which provides information concerning the fate of Morton and Edith. Such compromise both satisfies readers who regard some form of closure as necessary, while simultaneously suggesting that such neatness of conclusion is inevitably artificial of 'fictional'. The dialogue is dismissed as 'a detail of circumstance which every reader must have anticipated', thus depriving it of any real authority(p.420).

This strategy of non-closure in Scott's work indicates as consistently as his



reflexivity then, a desire to create an endless system of deferral, evading absolute conclusion and any final imposition of meaning within the text. As a narrative strategy it is in accordance with many other features of his work, which, as we have seen, seek to disrupt totalising models of identity, deconstruct the binary oppositions upon which they rest, and unsettle the position both of historical and political discourses and indeed the position of his own fictions in relation to them. All these strategies and thematic concerns are ones which can be seen in operation in *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*.

Published in 1818, and arguably the best known of Scott's fictions, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* comes F.R. Leavis claims, the nearest of all Scott's work to being a great novel. 'One had, however', he concluded, 'to make too many allowances for it to be properly considered that'.<sup>71</sup> It is hardly surprising that Leavis should have been unhappy with *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, challenging and deconstructing as it does its own totalising frameworks, and positing a model whereby the individual may resist his or her own inclusion within such destructive systems. It is a novel which in its own self-subverting methods and strategies explores the nature of discourse, and resists the impulses within it for totality.

Subversion is indeed indicated in the very title of the novel, which sets its location in Edinburgh, the centre of Scotland, and further, at the centre of that Edinburgh itself, at the very heart of Mid-Lothian. Such a centre is 'de-centred' or 'ex-centric', for it is positioned not in the heart of the union, London, but at the heart of its periphery, Scotland. Such a centre, Muir claims has only 'a blank, an Edinburgh in the middle of it', and *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* is an exploration of this very position.

In the novel, Jeanie Deans may be seen as a representative of this de-centred perspective. Scottish, a woman and a peasant, Jeanie is peripheral in every way, and the novel deals with her attempt to challenge absolute and totalising systems. Such systems are manifested by the trial of her sister and a legal system which can only position her within the binary categories of guilty and innocent. It is too, a system

implicit in the religion of her father for, Covenanting in his principles, Davie Deans can only perceive the world within such absolute categories. Such a position allows for no flexibility, and although Davie may be grief stricken by the loss of Effie, he commands an absolute judgement, calling down the punishment of the Lord upon her:

'Where', he said, with a voice that made the roof ring, 'where is the vile harlot, that has disgraced the blood of an honest man? - Where is she, that has no place among us, but has come foul with her sins, like the Evil One, among the children of God? - Where is she, Jeanie? - Bring her before me that I might kill her with a word and a look!'(p.111)

Faced with these systems, Jeanie chooses to operate within them, refusing, as her argument with Staunton suggests, to tell what must by their standards be construed as a lie. However, the remainder of the novel deals with her attempt to challenge such absolutist positions, and provide some provision for the ambiguous position of her sister and the equivocal stance which she embodies.

Concepts of the truth and discussions of how it may be defined are therefore a recurrent feature of *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, constantly pushing towards more problematic conceptions. Jeanie's argument with Staunton offers a prime example of such debate, but the text is littered with discussions concerning the nature of truth and how we might construct it. Davie Deans's religious principles offer one answer, for being an old Covenanter, he claims that no truth may be constituted by a government which does not declare the rights of the Covenant. 'Mysel am not clear to trinquet and traffic wi' courts o' justice as they are now constituted; I have a tenderness and a scruple in my mind anent them', he claims, suggesting *against* himself that truth may be a matter of context, of discursive construction, and not a fixed position(p.202).

Davie's position is, however, a paradoxical one, and one which Scott to some extent ridicules. While it may seem to challenge the legal system, it is as totalising as it, and Scott shows how any such absolutism must in the end lead to a grotesque distortion rather than revelation. Anxious to avoid any behaviour which might be seen as trafficking with a sinful establishment, the Covenanters' principles lead them both

to lengthy disputation and absurd conclusions:

This ardent and enlightened person and his followers had also great scruples about the lawfulness of bestowing the ordinary names upon the days of the week and the months of the year, which savoured in their nostrils so strongly of paganism, that at length they arrived at the conclusion that they who owned such names as Monday, Tuesday, January, February, and so forth, 'served themselves heirs to the same, if not greater punishment, than had been denounced against the idolators of old'.(p.205/206)

Such conclusions are clearly ridiculous, but certainly they also subvert any empiricist notion of what truth *is*.

An empirical notion of truth is also, as mentioned earlier, unsettled by the discussion of the legal system in the novel. When Jeanie goes to visit the Tolbooth, Effie, like Staunton, asks her sister to testify in her favour. Of her innocence she can easily persuade Jeanie, and in this context, the question of where truth lies becomes problematic. "'I daurna swear to an untruth'", Jeanie protests once again, but Effie suggests that the matter of truth cannot be so simple:

'And what d'ye ca' an untruth?' said Effie, again showing a touch of her former spirit - 'Ye are muckle to blame, lass, if ye think a mother would, or could, murder her ain bairn - Murder! - I wad hae laid down my life just to see a blink o' its ee!'(p.218)

True though this may be, however, within the binary framework of the legal system, if Effie cannot be proved innocent, she is condemned as guilty and sentenced to death.

While Jeanie may temporarily co-operate with these systems and their totalising notions of both truth and reality, it is equally clear why, as a Scot, a woman, and a peasant she must resist them. Such systems are, as Cixous points out, lethal for the periphery, for within them all that is marginal and ex-centric must be suppressed. In *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* such silencing is all too apparent, since, for Jeanie, an acceptance of this model involves the literal death of her sister.

Jeanie's heroism lies, then, in her refusal to be silenced. She, representative of the peripheral, the 'ex-centric', both walks to London - the centre - and demands to be given

voice, demands, indeed, to speak to the ultimate national 'centre', the queen. Her speech is too, one which gives the alternative perspective of the periphery, for it urges compassion and understanding, suggesting that there may be situations where a binary, totalising framework is inadequate:

'O madam, if ever ye kend what it was to sorrow for and with a sinning and a suffering creature, whose mind is sae tossed that she can be neither ca'd fit to live or die, have some compassion on our misery!'(p.391)

Jeanie's journey is, then, an *assault* or invasion by the periphery upon totalising systems, and it is one which is successful, for Effie is granted the royal pardon, an outcome fundamentally disruptive, for it suggests that there may be situations where an absolute system of law is inadequate and where a more flexible and ambiguous model may be required. It is perhaps, the novel suggests, only within such a flexible potentially self-deconstructive structure that 'truth' may be discovered, for while Effie's pardon may be against the letter of the law, it is certainly, as the Duke of Argyll recognises, in keeping with its spirit:

'It seems contrary to the genius of British law', continued the Duke, 'to take that for granted which is not proved, or to punish with death for a crime, which, for aught the prosecutor has been able to show, may not have been committed at all'.(p.372)

Jeanie's success is, therefore subversive, for it posits the need for a relative, even reflexive model of 'truth' as against the 'grand narrative' truth-systems proposed by the law and by her father. Her challenge to absolute systems and binary frameworks of thought, furthermore, relates not only to Effie, but also to the position of Scotland. This is implied from the outset, as Scott weaves the details of Effie's case into the circumstances of the historical Porteous riots. Not surprisingly, Scott, like Jeanie, is unwilling to condone such outright assault on legality and authority, but his novel is one which, nevertheless, unsettles, semiologically *invades*, the system by which it is

condemned. The relationship between the two narrative strands is one confirmed by Queen Caroline. 'Had you any friends engaged in the Porteous mob?', she asks Jeanie, and suggests that the unruly state of Scotland may stand in the way of Effie's pardon:

'All these fine speeches do not convince me of the propriety of so soon showing any mark of favour to your - I suppose I must not say rebellious? - but, at least, your very disaffected and intractable metropolis'.(p.390)

But just as, there may be mitigating circumstances to account for the high cases of child murder within Scotland - 'it's the cutty-stool, if your Laddyship pleases', Jeanie tells her, - so too, it is implied, there may be reasons to account for the dissatisfied state of Scotland within the union(p.388). 'Truth' is not, this suggests, a fixed and total system, and different contexts may demand different discursive sets of responses.

In *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, therefore, Scott attempts to 'procure sympathy for the foibles' of Scotland. He does so, however, not by simply drawing attention to her homogeneity with England, but by suggesting that both truth and reality are both multi-faceted and complex. 'Truth' itself is an entity in the process of 'melting and dissolving', he suggests, and no model which fails to account for this can be adequate either to represent the 'ontological' state of Scotland, of the union, or human experience. This conception is also worked out in the mode and structure of the novel.

Much debate has focused upon the structure of *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, and in particular upon its protracted conclusion. While nearly all commentators agree that the fourth volume contributes no more than a flaw in what would otherwise have been Scott's greatest novel, the more cynical suggest that it owes more to economic and business necessity than to artistic inspiration.<sup>72</sup> Whatever may have been the original reasons for the existence of the fourth volume of *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, however, it is in keeping with the challenge both to totality and to an empirical notion of the truth posited in the novel. An evasion of thematic closure and certainty is a common feature of Scott's fiction, and *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* is no exception, for in its fourth

volume Scott shows a deferral of any neat conclusion, and casts curious shadows on Jeanie's enterprise. The fourth volume is thus structurally unsettling, for it evades the neat moralising employed by Jedediah Cleishbotham and suggests that the outcome of Jeanie's walk to London and of Effie's pardon may be altogether more ambiguous. As a result of it the novel refuses to settle at the point of the traditional 'concluding chapter', and moves beyond this neat and 'natural' point of closure to suggest a model of experience far more ambivalent. By this protracted conclusion, authority is dissipated, handed over to the reader, as surely as in Barthes 'Death of the Author'.

*The Heart of Mid-Lothian* thus reflects in its very structure the challenge to totality and absolute concepts of the truth which it explores at a thematic level. This is a challenge also reflected in its mode which explores the ambiguous sources from which truth may spring. Any impulse in the novel towards metonymy is subverted by the presence of such characters as Madge Wildfire and by the inclusion of material, like those scenes which take place on Arthur's Seat, suggesting undertones of the supernatural. However, just as in *Redgauntlet* it is in the ex-centric discourse of 'Wandering Willie's Tale' that the 'secret' of identity is discovered, here it is within these curiously, typologically disruptive, metaphoric episodes that 'truth' is contained and the key to Effie's innocence revealed.

This metaphoric 'invasiveness' is not simply redemptive however; these disruptions provide as ambiguous and non-empirical concept of truth as any other to be found in the novel and one which thus equally evades any final and definite meaning. Grounded in legend, riddle and story, it is a form of truth which both defies reason and produces a highly volatile construction of reality. This is implied by Sharpitlaw's questioning of Madge, for, empiricist and rational in his approach, he can acquire no information. Ratcliffe, on the other hand, addresses Madge in her own medium, and by entering into her metaphoric reality persuades her to co-operate:

'She is ower far past reasonable folks' motives, sir, ' said Ratcliffe, 'to mind sillier, or John Dalgleish, or the cat-and-nine-tails either; but I think I could gar her tell us something'...  
...Ratcliffe laughed, and, winking to the procurator-fiscal, pursued the



It is, nevertheless, from Madge's stories that the truth is eventually divulged, and from both her account, and the equally curious source of a broad sheet ballad, that the secret of Effie's innocence is revealed. The truth at the heart of the novel is, consequently, an irreducibly metaphoric one, open to multiple levels of interpretation, and continually evasive, far more evasive, multiplistic and discursive than Sharpitlaw's empiricism can even begin to account for.

'The center', Derrida writes, 'is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its center elsewhere*.<sup>73</sup> The centre of this totality, the stones which form the tolbooth, 'the heart of midlothian' itself, 'were procured for the Author of *Waverley*', and 'employed in decorating the entrance of his kitchen-court at Abbotsford'(p.541).The 'centre' is thus located at the site of discourse, at the very point where the 'Wizard of the North' creates his stories of Scottish identity, his image of 'the blank, the Edinburgh', in the heart of Scotland.

The kinds of truth contained in stories are, however, revealed in Scott's work as ambiguous, ones which refuse to be pinned down and defined but, on the contrary are both slippery and evasive. 'Reality' at such a 'centre' is necessarily one which defies absolute and totalising frameworks and the binary distinctions between romance and reality, emotion and reason, history and story upon which they rest. On the contrary, it is a 'reality' melting and dissolving, always reflexively aware of the way in which truth is moulded by our linguistic descriptions of it, and so eager to slip out of too rigid and hence distorting a frame.

The image of Scotland which Scott creates in his work is thus an ambiguous one. By providing such an identity Scott sustains the true vitality of the periphery, for by giving voice to the contradictory and ambiguous forces in operation in Scottish society, and refusing to subjugate them one to the other, Scott is truly constructing the

grounds of an alternative perspective, the perspective of *différance*, a perspective which, rather than being based on its own totality, celebrates the virtues of the discursive multiplicity of identity and experience. This is the vision which he reflects in his writing, and this, rather than a romantic or a reconciled image is what he celebrates in his construction of *Scottish* identity. Scott's work, as it challenges the 'grammar' of absolute systems, their totalising models of language, experience and identity, thus offers a resistance to the very structures which seek to destroy the vitality of the periphery.

Such a reading of Scott's work is a radical one, but is supported by both the narrative strategies and thematic concerns in his fiction. It is also a reading which accounts for his uneasy relationship with traditional criticism, and suggests that the postmodern context may be one more sympathetic to his writing. Within the latter, Scott's work emerges as having far more to offer than a static and redundant image of Scotland. On the contrary, it challenges both fixed forms of identity and stable ontological interpretations, setting the challenge that in their semiological rigidity they may be wholly inadequate as grammars for personal, political, and historical experience.

- 1 Walter Scott, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, Centenary Edition, 25 vols (Edinburgh, 1886-1887), VII (1886).  
All references to Scott's work are, unless otherwise stated, to this edition. Where the particular text referred to is apparent, page numbers will be given in brackets after quotation.
- 2 A more detailed account of this reading of *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* will be given towards the end of the chapter.
- 3 A comment made by James Hogg in *Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott*, edited by Douglas Mack (Edinburgh, 1983), p.38.
- 4 Walter Scott, 'General Preface', *Waverley*, Centenary Edition, I (1886), pp.5-19 (p.9/10).
- 5 Walter Scott, *Rob Roy*, Centenary Edition, IV (1886), p.84.
- 6 Edgar Johnson, 'Scott and the Corners of Time', in *Scott Bicentenary Essays: Selected Papers Read at the Sir Walter Scott Bicentenary Conference*, edited by Alan Bell (Edinburgh, 1973), pp.18 - 37 (p.26).  
Johnson describes this question as a 'dead issue'.  
  
Andrew Hook, 'Scotland and Romanticism: The International Scene', in *The History of Scottish Literature*, 4 vols, edited by Cairns Craig (Aberdeen, 1987-1988), II, edited by Andrew Hook (1987), pp.307 -321 (p319).
- 7 Cairns Craig, 'The Body in the Kit -Bag: History and the Scottish Novel', *Cencrastus*, no.1 (Autumn, 1979), pp.18-22.
- 8 Cairns Craig, p.20.
- 9 Edwin Muir, *Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer* (London, 1936).
- 10 Edwin Muir, p.11/12
- 11 Edwin Muir p.173.
- 12 See Alan Bass, 'Introduction', *Writing and Difference* (London, 1978), pp.ix-xx (p.xvi). For a more detailed account see chapter 1 of this thesis.
- 13 Strange though Muir's argument may seem to a contemporary reader, it is one which is typical of the time when he wrote. In 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', T.S. Eliot had proposed that only writers writing from homogeneous and continuing cultures could produce first class literature, and this view is the one which Muir is following.
- 14 For an excellent introduction to the romance see Gillian Beer, *The Romance* The Critical Idiom Series, 10 (London, 1970).
- 15 Edgar Johnson, p.26.
- 16 These are of course ideas outlined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria: or Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions*, edited by George Watson (London, 1965).

- 17 Hélène Cixous, 'Sorties', reprinted in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, edited by David Lodge (London, 1988), pp.286-293.
- 18 Walter Scott, 'Romance', in *Supplement to the fourth, fifth and sixth editions of the Encyclopaedia Britannica*, edited by Macvey Napier (Edinburgh, 1824), VI, pp.435-456 (p.435).  
Scott refers to Dr Johnson's definition of the term. Johnson describes romance as 'a military fable of the middle ages; a tale of wild adventures in love and chivalry'.
- 19 *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott*, edited by David Douglas, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1890), I, p.155.
- 20 Scott writes to James Ballantyne in 1824 suggesting that the title is 'a great hit'. 'One fault it may have', he continues, 'that of inducing people to think the work is a tale of Chivalry - and disappointment is a bad thing'. *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, 12 vols, edited by H.J.C.Grierson (London, 1932 - 1937), VIII (1935), p.203.
- 21 Walter Scott, *The Antiquary*, Centenary Edition, III (1886)
- 22 Walter Scott, *Redgauntlet*, Centenary Edition, XVIII (1887)
- 23 Roman Jakobson, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague, 1956).  
After his studies of language disorder, Jakobson concludes that language relates to the world by two methods, the metaphoric and the metonymic. This distinction, he suggests, may be applied to categories of literature. Romance, he claims, functions by a metaphoric mode, while realism functions by the metonymic.
- 24 For a full discussion of the postmodern novel in relation to metaphor and metonymy see David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy and the Typology of Modern Literature* (London, 1977).
- 25 For a full discussion of this point see Chapter 1.
- 26 See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G.E.M.Anscombe (Oxford, 1953), p.153.
- 27 Walter Scott, 'Tales of My Landlord', *Quarterly Review*, 16 (1817), pp.430-480 (p.435).
- 28 R.D.S.Jack, *The Italian Influence on Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh, 1972), p.218.
- 29 Henry Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida* (Oxford, 1985), p.158.
- 30 Walter Scott, 'Introduction', *Rob Roy*, pp.3-51 (p.3).
- 31 Walter Scott, 'General Preface', p.8.
- 32 Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, translated by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (London, 1962).
- 33 Lukács, p.33.
- 34 Lukács, p.32.
- 35 'Tales of My Landlord', p.432.

- 36 'Tales of My Landlord', p.433.
- 37 For a discussion of Julia Kristeva and the concept of 'radical writing' see Chapter 1, p.23.
- 38 Charles Altieri, 'Wittgenstein on Consciousness and Language: A Challenge to Derridean Literary Theory', *Modern Language Notes*, 91 (1976), pp.1397-1423 (p.1408).
- 39 F.R.Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London,1948), p.6. For a full discussion see Chapter1.
- 40 Such criticisms are made for example, by A.O. J. Cockshut, *The Achievement of Sir Walter Scott* (London, 1969), p.38.
- 41 C.Gregory Smith, *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (London, 1919). It was in this study that the term 'antisyzygy' was first employed to describe the inability of Scottish literature to settle into a 'realistic' and stable form. Smith himself concludes that these contradictions 'need not disconcert us'. Later critics, however, have used the term in a negative sense.
- 42 Hugh MacDiarmid, 'The Caledonian Antisyzygy', in *The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid*, edited by Michael Grieve and W.R.Aitken, 2 vols (Great Britain, 1985),II, p.1052.
- 43 *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott* , III (1932), p.302. This letter is addressed to a 'Miss Clephane'.
- 44 *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott*, I, p.153.
- 45 A.O.J. Cockshut, p.195/196.
- 46 Ian Jack, *Sir Walter Scott* (London, 1958), p.24.
- 47 Kathryn Sutherland offers an interesting angle to this aspect of the novel when she suggests the demands of 'cross dressing' in it imply a need for Darsie to recognise the 'feminine' aspect of his self. See 'Introduction' to *Redgauntlet*, Oxford World's Classics Edition, edited by Kathryn Sutherland (Oxford, 1985).
- 48 For an elaboration of this point see G.A.M. Wood, 'The Manuscripts and Proof Sheets of *Redgauntlet*, in *Scott Bicentenary Essays*, pp.160-175.
- 49 Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory Fiction* (London, 1988).
- 50 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power: An Attempted Transvaluation of all Values*, translated by Anthony M. Ludovici, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, edited by Oscar Levy, 18 vols (Edinburgh and London, 1909-1910), XV (1810), sec.481, p.12.
- 51 Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1811),III,p.27.
- 52 Walter Scott, *Life of Napoleon Buonaparte: Emperor of the French* (Edinburgh, 1827).This runs to nine volumes.  
John Gibson Lockhart, *Life of Sir Walter Scott* (Edinburgh,1839). Lockhart's *Life* is ten volumes and consists of a mass of detail.
- 53 Walter Scott, 'Romance', p.436.

- 54 Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London, 1987), p.17.
- 55 Marilyn Orr, 'Voices and Text: Scott the Storyteller Scott the Novelist, *Scottish Literary Journal*, 16, no.2 ( November, 1989), pp.41-59.
- 56 Walter Scott, *Old Mortality*, Centenary Edition, V (1886).
- 57 Walter Scott, *Old Mortality*, p.61.
- 58 For a full discussion of this point see Chapter 1.
- 59 David Hewitt, 'Walter Scott', in *The History of Scottish Literature*, III, edited by Douglas Gifford ( 1988), pp.65-85 (p.69).
- 60 Hugh Blair, I, p.7/8.
- 61 Hugh Blair, II, p.427.
- 62 John Chisholm, *Sir Walter Scott as a Judge: His Decisions in the Sheriff Court of Selkirk* (Edinburgh, 1918).
- 63 'Degree zero' is a term coined by Roland Barthes in his study *Writing Degree Zero*, in *Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology*, translated by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London, 1967).  
Barthes suggests that there is no 'writing degree zero', no point where there is no space or slippage between meaning and text.
- 64 'Game-rules' is a term coined by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations* translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford, 1953) to describe the way in which language may be seen to operate once it is no longer described as fixed to an absolute system.
- 65 Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', reprinted in David Lodge, *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, pp.167-172 (p.171).
- 66 Walter Scott, 'General Preface', p.14.
- 67 Thomas Crawford, *Walter Scott* (Edinburgh, 1982), p.13/14.
- 68 Walter Scott, 'Introductory Epistle', *The Fortunes of Nigel*, Centenary Edition, XIV (1886) pp.8-24  
The prefaces to the novels, along with the *Quarterly Review* article 'Tales of my Landlord', are conveniently reprinted in *The Prefaces to the Waverley Novels*, edited by Mark A. Weinstein (Nebraska, 1978).
- 69 Walter Scott, 'Introductory Epistle', *The Fortunes of Nigel*, p.12.
- 70 This phrase comes from R.L. Stevenson's essay 'El Dorado', in *Virginibus Puerisque*, Skerryvore Edition, XXII, pp.95-98 (p.98).  
This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 which deals specifically with Stevenson's work.
- 71 F.R. Leavis, p.6.
- 72 David Daiches suggests this in *Sir Walter Scott and His World*, (London, 1976), p.101.
- 73 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.279.



**CHAPTER 3:**

**'OVERTURN, OVERTURN, OVERTURN': SUBVERSION, INDETERMINACY  
AND JAMES HOGG'S FICTIONAL STRATEGIES**

In his 1949 introduction to James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, André Gide sets the novel in a contemporary context by pointing out its relevance in an age of totalitarianism. 'All fanaticism', he comments, 'is capable of bringing forth similar dispensers of Justice.'<sup>1</sup> John Wain, in his introduction to the Penguin edition of 1983, draws a similar parallel:

We who live in an age when so many unspeakable things have been done by people who considered themselves absolved from evil because they were serving a cause, can only acknowledge that James Hogg's portrayal of the stages by which a human spirit can descend into darkness - a portrayal set in a society very different from our own but sharing its widespread harshness and intolerance - is sombre, truthful and unforgettable.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, the 'postmodern condition', Lyotard suggests is one which perceives the dangers of fanaticism and totalitarianism, and their claims to embrace absolute values and absolute truths. 'The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take', he writes, 'we have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one'.<sup>3</sup> It does, consequently, seem valuable to discuss Hogg's novel in the light of such attitudes, for it embraces an exploration of, and challenge to, absolute systems in a way which may be particularly well understood in the present postmodern context. It is my intention here to discuss *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* in this context alongside other of Hogg's fiction, and to explore the ways in which his work offers both a critique of totalising systems, and by implication, a challenge to the central tenets of Enlightenment thought.<sup>4</sup>

Absolute frameworks are discussed most directly in *The Confessions* in the form of Antinomianism. Proposed by Johannes Agricola in 1538, the Antinomian heresy that those saved by divine grace stand outside the moral law, rapidly became a persistent perversion of the Calvinist faith in Scotland.<sup>5</sup> Of Hogg's first hand experience of the doctrine we can have no doubt, for two of the figures most closely related to the controversies in Scotland, Thomas Boston and James Hog, had lived in Hogg's own parish only a generation earlier.<sup>6</sup> More indirectly, Hogg had experienced the effects of the creed in literature, not least in Burns's 'Holy Willie's Prayer'.

Hogg's admiration of Burns has been frequently acknowledged, and it is clear that his *Confessions* shares much in common with his mentor's satire.<sup>7</sup> Like Holy Willie, Robert claims for his mother the status of 'a burning and a shining light, in the community of Scottish worthies', and like him too, Robert believes himself above the code of moral law(p.97).

The interest of Antinomianism in the more general understanding of *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* lies, however, in the fact that Hogg moves beyond Burns's satirical and witty position to a much more complex analysis of what emerges as a totalising and totalitarian system of thought. In doing so, he explores the potentials and dangers of Antinomianism to a degree well beyond the comprehension of Holy Willie, and extends his fictional critique to a far reaching assessment of the kind of essentialist certainties and empiricist values which formed the basis of the Enlightenment and of modernity.<sup>8</sup>

Antinomian beliefs are first introduced to us in the Editor's description of Mrs Colwan. To the rational and commonsensical Editor, such beliefs can only be seen as extreme:

Hers were not the tenets of the great reformers, but theirs mightily overstrained and deformed. Theirs was an unguent hard to be swallowed; bur hers was that unguent embittered and overheated until nature could no longer bear it. She had imbibed her ideas from the doctrines of one flaming predestinarian alone; and they were so rigid, that they became a stumbling-block to many of his brethren, and a mighty handle for the enemies of his party to turn the machine of the state against them.(p.2)

While the reader of *The Confessions* may not always agree with the Editor, few could dispute his assessment of such values. 'Rigid', 'flaming', and 'deformed' they certainly appear, all the more so when we see them in the hands of Robert Wringhim, the justified sinner himself. For Robert, unquestionably, salvation and damnation form part of an absolute system, one which, like those challenged by postmodernism, is a binary, fixed, and inalterable one. One is, in his eyes, either saved or one is damned; a position determined from the beginning of time. Wringhim's interpretation of the code surpasses even the comprehension of his mother, or Wringhim senior, for

as Robert sees it, within this Antinomian world model there can be no room for ambiguity, ambivalence, or any reassessment:

The more I pondered on these things, the more I saw of the folly and inconsistency of ministers, in spending their lives, striving and remonstrating with sinners, in order to induce them to do that which they had it not in their power to do. Seeing that God had from all eternity decided the fate of every individual that was to be born of woman, how vain was it in man to endeavour to save those whom their Maker had, by an unchangeable decree, doomed to destruction.(p.123)

There can be no doubt that such a system, at least as it is interpreted here, posits an absolutist episteme resting on the certainties and unalterable 'Truth' of its own values, and the fateful rigidity of its 'damnatory creed'.<sup>9</sup> Totality is expressed in the very language which Robert employs, for he rhetorically embraces infinity in the future tense 'was to be born' and an absolute fate in the concluding alliterative 'decree, doomed to destruction'. Those who are not saved are, in his view, undoubtedly 'sinners' and their attempts to live their lives in the hope of salvation are futile.

Such models are, of course, recognised as dangerous by postmodernism also, for their desire to resist the dislocations, slippages and gaps within their own rhetorics, their silencing of the internal incongruities and alternative perspectives 'in excess' of their apparent totality, leads them to deceptively convincing forms of 'reason' and discourse, and the need to negate all those aspects of experience which undermine their own position.

While Hogg, like Scott before him, clearly writes less from a philosophical position than from a direct response to his own experience, he has a similar distrust of any such single or totalising episteme for interpreting the world, advising against them, for instance, in his sermon 'To Parents':

I am persauded, however, that no man alive is able to set down a system that can either be agreeable or profitable to all. There has never been a system on this, or any other subject, since the building of Babel and the confusion of tongues, which has been of the least service to mankind.<sup>10</sup>

No system, Hogg concludes, can be appropriate for all circumstances or 'total' in this

sense. Likewise, any system which attempts to provide such a comprehensive epistemic code will lead to 'Babel', or a confusing and misleading appropriation of discourse.

Such a conclusion at the end of Hogg's career is hardly surprising, for in *The Confessions* he offers a critique of just such absolute systems and explores the dangers of them. Not least among these dangers is, of course, Gil-Martin. Much critical debate has focused on this 'ex-centric' figure and the question of whether he is to be perceived as a personification of Robert's deranged psyche or as a physical manifestation of the devil himself.<sup>11</sup> The question is, of course, one which cannot be finally answered, for Hogg evades any definite interpretation within the narrative. What is clear, however, is that Gil-Martin's appearance is intrinsically linked to Robert's acceptance of an absolute system. Robert himself describes the two events as concurrent:

An exhaltation of spirit lifted me, as it were, far above the earth, and the sinful creatures crawling on its surface; and I deemed myself as an eagle among the children of men, soaring on high, and looking down with pity and contempt on the grovelling creatures below.

As I thus wended my way, I beheld a young man of a mysterious appearance coming towards me. I tried to shun him, being bent on my own contemplations; but he cast himself in my way, so that I could not well avoid him; and more than that, I felt a sort of invisible power that drew me towards him, something like the force of enchantment, which I could not resist.(p.116)

Once the individual has accepted a total system, this suggests, he is confluent with evil, and however he may try to avoid it, is repeatedly ensnared.

This process of 'possession' is carefully charted in the novel: having accepted his 'election' within the Antinomian model, Robert finds it impossible to rid himself of his sinister companion. As a result, he is finally entirely without personal freedom, for as he describes, 'either I had a second self who transacted business in my likeness, or else my body was at times possessed by a spirit over which it had no controul, and of whose actions my own soul was not wholly conscious'(p.182). Such possession is, in the end, to lead to his suicide, of course, a death in which, intrinsically linked to Gil-Martin as Robert is, the two characters must pursue each other to mutual

destruction.

A loss of personal self and free will is, *The Confessions* suggests, the final and irreducible consequence of accepting a total system. Yet to some extent, this is the initial attraction of Antinomianism for Robert. Unwilling to accept the moral responsibility involved in a more ambiguous and flexible 'grammar' of human experience and morality, Antinomianism seems at first to offer a welcome freedom.<sup>12</sup> This is again apparent in the circumstances of Robert's election. Earlier, Robert relates his agonies concerning the nature of sin. 'I could not help running into new sins continually', he tells us and 'I got into great confusion relating to my sins and repentances'(p.108). Unable to cope with a 'grammar' where the game-rules may be continually reassessed within a framework of moral relativism, it is hardly surprising that Robert should 'weep for joy' at the news of his election, delighted 'to be thus assured of my freedom from all sin' - freed from the burden of moral responsibility(p.115). To enter this rigid moral framework, where rules need not be continually reassessed and reconsidered is, however, to lose not only responsibility, but also choice and freedom. It is in fact, precisely this unyielding structure which leads to Robert's association with Gil-Martin and his eventual complete possession. Alternative and more flexible grammars for both morality and human relations are, however, offered in the novel.

Most notably, a more ambiguous model of faith and moral relations is offered in the preachings of Mr Blanchard. While, for the Antinomian, grace is perceived as a preordained and single decree, setting out from the beginning of time those who are to be saved and those who must be damned, Blanchard suggests a more flexible epistemic code, suggesting, rather, that morality is an evolving grammar worked out in a variety of contexts. Such a flexible construction of morality carries with it responsibility, however, for within it "'it was every man's own blame if he was not saved!'"(p.135). Yet such a framework also of course offers freedom from the kind of possession which envelops Robert.

This more flexible moral episteme is one which Hogg certainly embraces in his



fiction. In his short story 'Sound Morality', Hogg again indicates that the kind of rigid moral framework proposed by Wringhim is inadequate, for *no-one* is so pure as to assume themselves to be in an unalterable state of grace.<sup>13</sup> 'Sound morality' is in this story a far more complex thing, figured as the benevolence of a Highlander to his sick clanswoman. Echoing the parable of the Good Samaritan, Hogg explores how we may define a moral position. Absolute and binary categories are clearly inadequate, for goodness may be lodged in the most ambiguous of places. Here, the 'Samaritan' must beg in order to raise money for his clanswoman, adapting conventional 'game-rules' of morality to meet the immediate needs of the situation. 'Sound morality' is therefore embodied in a complex grammar, far removed from the rigid system advocated by Wringhim. What such a moral code incorporates, however, is precisely the human compassion and understanding which Robert's unyielding framework lacks.

Human compassion - the ability to adopt new game-rules in the continually evolving landscape of human experience - is persistently made the basis of the more flexible moral code which Hogg evolves through his fictions. Such codes are at odds with the 'grand narratives' of abstract moral epistemes for they are grounded in an engagement with the realities of experience. Certainly, this is what is suggested in *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*.<sup>14</sup> Frequently read as a pro-Covenanting response to Scott's *Old Mortality*, *The Brownie of Bodsbeck* is, rather, - again echoing the Good Samaritan parable - an evocation of human compassion beyond the abstract polarities of Whig and Tory factions.<sup>15</sup> While his daughter Katherine and his wife Maron may hold opposed positions within this binary framework, Walter remains uncommitted to either party:

Walter despised Clerk and his tenets both most heartily; he saw that he was a shallow, hypocritical, and selfish being, and that he knew nothing of the principles in which he pretended to instruct them; therefore he regretted sore the influence that he had gained over his family. Neither did he approve of the rigid and rebellious principles which he believed the Covenanters professed. When he met with any man, or community of men, who believed in any thing and held it sacred, Walter revered that, and held it sacred likewise; but it was rather from a deference to the belief and feelings of his fellow creatures than his own conviction. In short, Walter was an honest, conscientious, good, old-fashioned man, but he made no great fuss

about religion, and many supposed that he did not care a pin who was right or who was wrong.(p.14)

It is also deference to the feelings of his fellow creatures, rather than empathy with their beliefs, which eventually leads Walter to aid the Covenanters. Horrified by the wretched state of these outlaws, notably described by the narrator in the most compassionate of terms, Walter is moved to help them, stating, "'I dinna gie a bawbee about your leagues and covenants, and associations, for I think aye there's a great deal o' faction and dourness in them; but or I'll desert a fellow-creature that's oppressed, if he's an honest man, od, I'll gie up the last button on my breast'"(p.23).

Quite the opposite conception of morality is adopted by Claverhouse, who, unlike Walter, operates within an absolute and rigid moral system. His model is, like Robert's, a binary and inflexible one, with Tory principles on the one hand representing what is good and 'true', Whig and Covenanting sentiments on the other, positioned firmly on the side of 'evil'. In the name of this political framework, Claverhouse - at least as he is presented in *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*, commits atrocity upon atrocity, defying any form of human compassion.

Not surprisingly, in *The Confessions* a more flexible and compassionate system is favoured. Such a moral code is proposed not only by Blanchard, but by Robert's brother, George Colwan. While far less overtly religious or pious than his brother, George's moral system is one which is both flexible and relativistic, prepared as he is to evolve new game-rules to meet the needs of individual situations. So, while he has been brought up to distrust his brother, he is nevertheless willing to offer the hand of friendship. "'I shall not have my mind burdened with the reflection'", he considers, "'that my own mother's son yearned for a reconciliation with me, and was repulsed by my haughty and insolent behaviour'"(p.38). Thus resolved to 'accost him as one brother ought to address another' he goes to Arthur's Seat with such sentiments in his heart:

The grass and flowers were loaden with dew; and, on taking off his hat to wipe his forehead, he perceived that the black glossy fur of which his chaperon was wrought, was all covered with a tissue of the most delicate silver- a fairy web, composed of little spheres, so minute

that no eye could discern any one of them; yet there they were, shining in lovely millions.(p.39)

Advocating forgiveness, George seems here to be in favour with nature, and blessed by heaven in the beauties of the morning.

This more flexible and compassionate system is, likewise, one available to Robert. Brought up within the strictest Antinomian household, Robert's life may seem to fall inevitably within the framework of its tenets. Certainly, to explore how far this is so offers an interesting psychological reading of the novel.<sup>16</sup> Yet, Hogg is also anxious to suggest that a more flexible moral grammar is available to him. This is indeed suggested by the manifestations of grace in the novel, for they make it clear that at every crucial point Robert is offered the opportunity to turn away from his own absolutist system towards the more flexible 'grammar' of heavenly grace. Certainly he is offered this opportunity as he approaches his brother on Arthur's Seat. Robert himself describes the appearance of a white lady warning him against his intention to kill his brother:

While I sat pondering on these things, I was involved in a veil of white misty vapour, and looking up to heaven, I was just about to ask direction from above, when I heard as it were a still small voice close by me, which uttered some words of derision and chiding. I looked intensely in the direction whence it seemed to come, and perceived a lady, robed in white, who hasted towards me. She regarded me with a severity of look and gesture that appalled me so much, I could not address her; but she waited not for that, but coming close to my side, said, without stopping, 'Preposterous wretch! how dare you lift your eyes to heaven with such purposes in your heart? Escape homeward and save your soul, or farewell forever!'(p.157/158)

Asking for heavenly grace, Robert clearly receives it. But in spite of the fact that he recognises what he is doing as a 'crime' against the game-rules of any more flexible moral law - any moral law that must be worked out in context - Robert turns his back on this heavenly messenger. Gil-Martin has only to appeal once again to a more absolutist doctrine and suggest that 'he had been in a state of sinful doubting at the time, and it was to these doubtings she had adverted', for Robert to be convinced.

Firmly aligned to a rigid moral code, and unwilling to accept the moral responsibility inherent in a more flexible epistemic system, Robert is persuaded at every turn to commit moral atrocities. Yet at each point he hesitates, considering the

possibility of a more relativistic grammar. Both before the murder of Blanchard, and the killing of his brother, such consideration is manifest:

I approved of it in theory, but my spirit stood aloof from the practice. I saw and was convinced that the elect of God would be happier, and purer, were the wicked and unbelievers all cut off from troubling and misleading them, but if it had not been the instigations of this illustrious stranger, I should never have presumed to begin so great a work myself.(p.137)

And again, before the death of his father and brother:

'The God of heaven forbid it!' said I. 'They are enemies to Christ and his church, that I know and believe; but they shall live and die in their iniquity for me, and reap their guerdon when their time cometh. There my hand shall not strike.'(p.145)

Yet, in each case, Robert chooses his own rigid and damnatory system, justifying his decision within the framework of its own Antinomian creed. Having accepted this total framework it becomes ever more unlikely that Robert will escape it, for having abandoned personal free will, he is to be led into deeper and deeper ensnarement.

My mind was so much weakened, or rather softened about this time, that my faith began a little to give way, and I doubted most presumptuously of the least tangible of all Christian tenets, namely, of *the infallibility of the elect*. I hardly comprehended the great work I had begun, and doubted of *my own* infallibility, or that of any created being. But I was brought over again by the unwearied diligence of my friend to repent of my backsliding, and view once more the superiority of the Almighty's counsels in its fullest latitudes. Amen.(p.147)

While then at each point Robert has the choice to turn from this rigid code towards a more flexible grammar, increasingly we are aware that he will not do so. Instead, he chooses to solidify the framework of his own rigid system, consolidating its boundaries until they form a trap around him.

Total systems, claims Derrida, can stand no discourse 'in excess' of their own system. Robert's system likewise, faced with the 'horrible misconception' of Blanchard's more compassionate grammar of morality, insists that it must be silenced. The result is the death of not only Mr Blanchard, but also of George, and of Wringhim's father. Yet the system is a self consuming, 'deconstructive' one, for

finally, Robert, realising the terror that he has called into being, strives to escape from it. Horrifyingly, the consequence can only be his own silencing, and his death by suicide. That suicide, however, offers the final riddle of the novel, for whether at the end Robert chooses again a rigid episteme - 'The hour of repentance is past, and now my fate is inevitable' - or whether he dies at last accepting the kinder 'grammar' of heavenly compassion, we can never ascertain(p.240 ).

Total codes and rigid epistemes are in *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of A Justified Sinner* the cause of Robert's possession, his contingent loss of freedom, and in the end both terror and atrocity. The trap which they create is, however, also a linguistic one, created by argument and reasonable debate - the Babel which Hogg identifies in 'To Parents' . This discursive aspect of total and rigid systems is again one which Hogg explores in *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*. In that novel, total positions and the binary oppositions upon which they rest lead to the most distorted sorts of reasoning as Claverhouse's faith in the 'higher truth' of his own principles leads him to shape reality in alarming ways. Absolutist systems, Hogg reveals, while searching for essential reality, repeatedly lead to distorted constructions of experience. Certainly, Claverhouse's persistent adherence to a rigid distinction between Whig and Tory serves this purpose in *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*, for rather than giving him, as he might claim, access to a more empirical notion of reality, or an essential form of 'truth', it does, in fact, lead him to the grossest distortions of it. This is what is suggested by the trials of both John Hoy and Walter's sons, for like that of Effie Deans in Scott's *Heart of Mid-Lothian*, Claverhouse's attempts to gain access to what he perceives as the truth only serve to provide a distortion of it.<sup>17</sup> Seeing things only in terms of his own absolute interpretive system, Claverhouse interprets Hoy's answers to his questions to suit his own purposes, producing, as Hoy laments, a peculiar - and dangerous - version of reality:

Then looking back to Clavers, he added, 'Gude-sooth, lad, but ye'll mak mae whigs wherever ye show your face, than a' the hill preachers o' Scotland put thegither.'(p.66)



Robert Wringhim is also caught within similar boundaries, for *The Confessions* shows that once a rigid system has been accepted, almost anything may be claimed in the name of its higher truth and higher reasoning.

Rhetoric, argument and reasoning, consequently, become key aspects of the novel, for Hogg shows how they may be used not in fact to give access to essential 'truth' or presence but, indeed, to deceive and dissemble. Hogg himself was, certainly, no stranger to the ways in which reasoning and argument could be used to distort truth and act as a persuasive tool. Both as a member of the 'Right, Right or Wrong Club', and in his associations with Lockhart and the *Blackwood's* Circle, he was well acquainted with the use of argument to manipulative ends.<sup>18</sup> In his *A Tour of the Highlands in 1803*, he describes a conversation concerning a recently published pamphlet:

The piece itself was sound, simple reasoning and common sense, but every possible method was taken to wrest the sentiments, that the ideas might be turned into ridicule. In particular, they objected, and not without considerable show of reason, that the whole of it went directly to counteract the intent of its publication, which being to confute the arguments of Mr Hume, it would readily induce the country people, many of whom had never heard of Mr Hume nor his book, to search for and consult it, when there was little doubt of their finding his argument stronger and more impressive than those set down in the pamphlet.<sup>19</sup>

The arguments in the pamphlet 'A Dissertation on Miracles' have clearly been examined in great detail. But Hogg suggests that the reasoning by which this is done is itself dubious, loaded with its own ideological presumptions. Interpretation, however reasonable it may sound is never neutral, but displays within it an attempt to see reality in its own image. In the light of post-structuralist analyses such a conclusion is hardly surprising, for all language may be seen to silence the dislocations and disruptions within it. The 'plain language' of reason is thus discredited, for it too hides within itself a host of evasive and slippery dislocations.

Such an understanding of language is one manifestly explored in *The Confessions* where there is much which, while showing 'considerable show of reason', is used to distort rather than illuminate experience. Just as Robert's early arguments have a



fundamental logic about them, so his possession also proceeds by an alarming display of reason. While L. L. Lee argues that Robert's demise evolves from a *distorted* reason, Ian Campbell suggests that what the novel actually shows is the way in which the Antinomian may use both language and reason to promote any principle once their own beliefs have been accepted:

The devilish deception is effortless, for it follows certain simple rules. The justified can be brought to any state of mind by logical argument, if the argument accepts their own premises. The point is made again and again as the novel proceeds...  
...Indeed, the whole point of the interlude in Auchtermuchty, when the Devil deludes the inhabitants of the town by preaching a sublime sermon, is that people who are too argumentative can be gulled into any frame of mind.<sup>20</sup>

Certainly, those who define reality in terms of absolute semiological frameworks can be gulled into any frame of mind, and in *The Confessions*, there are many examples of 'sublime sermons' which serve to prove it.

In his preface to *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, Edward Fisher recognises that part of the danger of Antinomianism lay in the ability of its followers to manipulate rhetoric:

These are they that can talk like believers, and yet do not walk like believers: these are they that have language like saints, and yet conversation like devils: these are they that are not obedient to the law of Christ and therefore are justly called Antinomians.<sup>21</sup>

Certainly this is true in *The Confessions*, for Robert himself illustrates from an early age the ways in which, in the hands of the 'elect', logical reasoning may be developed. This leads him, in fact, to alarming conclusions, and indeed it is his faith in 'reason' - consistent within his own essentialist system - which exposes him to the rhetoric and argument of Gil-Martin, for it is by reason and language that Gil-Martin persuades Robert to continue in his atrocities. Gil-Martin's skill lies, as Douglas Gifford points out, in the fact that he is made 'to speak absolute truth, but in a context which will achieve the effect of a lie.'<sup>22</sup> Thus while he may not use *distorted* reason, Gil-Martin shows the way in which reason, argument, and language may themselves be used to

provide an 'unreasonable' model of experience. Asked by Robert the nature of his origins, Gil-Martin gives, whether we perceive him to be the devil or an aspect of Robert's psyche, the following 'honest' explanation:

'I have no parents save one, whom I do not acknowledge, ' said he proudly; 'therefore , pray drop that subject, for it is a disagreeable one. I am a being of a very peculiar temper, for though I have servants and subjects more than I can number, yet, to gratify a certain whim, I have left them, and retired to this city, and for all the society it contains, you see I have attached myself only to you. This is a secret, and I tell it you only in friendship, therefore pray let it remain one, and say not another word about the matter.'(p.129/130)

While Gil-Martin's words can clearly be interpreted in many fashions they contain nothing which is explicitly dishonest. Where distortion does enter, however, is in Robert's understanding, for convinced as he is of his own position of salvation, he settles on the least likely of interpretations concluding without question that, 'this was no other than the Czar Peter of Russia'(p.130). Elsewhere too what is false arises from Robert's own flawed semiological matrix. Rigid in his own beliefs, Robert can be convinced by even the most badly constructed of arguments. Certainly this is the case regarding Robert's reaction to the white lady whom he meets on Arthur's seat, Gil-Martin persuading Robert that her chiding refers only to a loss of faith in his own salvation. However, if we recall Robert's description of her, this is clearly far from logical. What is logical is that settled as he is upon a notion of what is absolutely true, Robert may be persuaded by any discourse which seems to support it, no matter how many dislocations and slippages it must silence in order to be maintained.

Rationalised systems are thus shown in *Confessions* to silence all those perspectives which appear to undermine their own position. Repeatedly this is Robert's response to alternative perspectives, for while the reality which Robert creates for himself can be interpreted within many possible discourses, characters like Penpunt suggesting alternative evaluations of it, Robert has no choice but to dismiss these readings of his own situation:

I took down a few of these in writing, to put off the time, and here leave them on record to show how the best and greatest actions are misconstrued amongst sinful and ignorant men.(p.193/194)

The irony is, of course, that although in this novel we can be certain of nothing, we more than suspect that it is Robert who has a misconstrued interpretation of the world he is inhabiting, and that in most people's eyes he is more sinful and ignorant than his servant. No matter what evidence he may be faced with, blinkered by the rigid boundaries of his own moral code, Robert distorts argument and reasoning into the matrix of his own episteme.

Through Gil-Martin and the ways in which his reasoning proceeds, James Hogg is clearly exploring, as he does in *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*, the ways in which the most rationalistic and apparently common sensical of discourses may be dissembling. When based on a belief in an essential epistemic 'presence', language becomes totalising, silencing the gaps and slippages which subvert its chosen system. For social critics like Lyotard, the danger of such discourse is that in the name of the 'truth' which it claims for itself, it may lead to the most appalling of conclusions. This also, significantly, is the danger of Robert's position as it is explored in Hogg's *Confessions*, for in the end, any position may indeed be 'justified'.

This horrible conclusion is in fact apparent from the outset, for it is clear that even before his meeting with Gil-Martin Robert is capable of reasoning himself into the most horrific actions. Such behaviour is, as Gide and Wain point out, typical of modern totalitarian systems and of the models which they adopt to justify their own atrocities. Robert, similarly, concludes that it is in vain to preach to those who are doomed to damnation, and proceeds:

I could not disbelieve the doctrine which the best of men had taught me, and toward which he made the whole of the Scriptures to bear, and yet it made the economy of the Christian world appear to me as an absolute contradiction. How much more wise would it be, thought I, to begin and cut sinners off with the sword! for till that is effected, the saints can never inherit the earth in peace.(p.123)

Little in literature is more chilling than Robert's description of Christian economy, yet

in the light of post-structuralist thought it is hardly surprising, as Robert literally seeks to silence any voice 'in excess' of his own system of thought.

Robert's discourse on Christian economy is, however, one which is deconstructed in the novel, for it is shown to rest on an inadequate polarisation between damnation and salvation, good and evil. Total systems, the postmoderns suggest, frequently rest on such frameworks which, while pervading western thought and language, may be recognised as irreducibly misleading. Language, in proceeding not by a system of opposition, but by the 'slippage' and '*différance*' between terms, discredits oppositional 'grammars' which are abandoned as inadequate models for interpreting the world. Nevertheless, it is precisely these binary systems that are maintained and promoted by the 'centre' - by those who propose total systems - in order that they may retain power. Likewise, this is an aspect of Antinomianism explored by Hogg for, as the Editor points out with a wry note of humour, much of its strength arises from such disruption and from the desire to continually create systems of opposition even on the most ridiculous of issues:

Then, after due thanks returned, they parted rejoicing in spirit; which thanks, by the by, consisted wholly in telling the Almighty what he was; and informing him, with very particular precision, what *they* were who addressed him; for Wringhim's whole system of popular declamation consisted it seems in this, -to denounce all men and women to destruction, and then hold out hopes to his adherents that they were the chosen few, included in the promises, and who could never fall away. It would appear that this pharisaical doctrine is a very delicious one, and the most grateful of all others to the worst characters.(p.55/56)

By such an antagonistic system, Wringhim may constantly reassert the supremacy of the 'elect', precisely as he defines it. Hogg himself despised such an oppositional method of discourse, protesting against it in his sermon on 'Good Breeding':

Whenever the desire of victory is the motive of a colloquial combatant, the claims of easy and agreeable conversation are at an end. We do not meet with our friends to fight a battle, but to be pleased and instructed. Every kind of wrangling ought to be excluded from the intercourse of friends, and the entertainer or president of a company ought to check it, at whatever expense of chagrin to the aggressors.<sup>23</sup>

Such wrangling seems to insult Hogg's sensibilities all the more so when its basis is a religious one. Here in another sermon entitled 'Virtue the Only Source of Happiness', Hogg comments on those who claim that there is no salvation to be found outside their own religious community:

I pity all such followers of the meek and lowly Jesus; for if we seek him with all our hearts, according to the monitor which he has placed in every human bosom, then we are all flowers of the Almighty's garden, and though of different hues, shall all bloom together with him in Paradise.<sup>24</sup>

Yet such tolerance is alien to any true believer in an absolute system, and certainly outside the comprehension of the Antinomians:

Lady Dalcastle got plenty of time to read, and pray, and meditate; but she was at a great loss for one to dispute with about religious tenets; for she found, that without this advantage, about which there was a perfect rage at that time, her reading, and learning of Scripture texts, and sentences of intricate doctrine, availed her nought; so that she was often driven to sit at her casement and look out for the approach of the heathenish Laird of Dalcastle.(p.10)

As it is described in *The Confessions* such disputation is clearly absurd. Taken to its logical conclusions it is also dangerous. But such behaviour is, Hogg suggests in *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of A Justified Sinner*, the inevitable and terrible conclusion of an absolute system. Such rigid models, he shows, are by nature oppositionary, totalitarian, and in the end 'monstrous'.

In the light of the exploration of Antinomianism offered in *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, it is hardly surprising that James Hogg should subvert similarly totalising systems in his own work. While such perversions of religious faith may have had their place in Scottish experience, it is clear that they incorporate a view of religion which Hogg not only rejects, but actively challenges and disrupts. There is evidence throughout Hogg's work which shows that he perceived the kind of rigid episteme which Robert Wringhim promotes as being out of place within the world of lived experience. While absolute judgement and absolute categories may apply in a spiritual dimension they have, as Robin Johnson suggests in

Hogg's tale 'Mr Adamson of Laverhope', no place in the temporal world:

'There's ae wee bit text that focks should never lose sight o', said Robin, 'an it's this,- "Judge not, that ye be not judged." 'I think', said Robin, when he told the story, 'I think that steekit their gabs!'<sup>25</sup>

This is also the implication of the Auchtermuchty tale as Penpunt recounts it to Robert Wringhim. The town of Auchtermuchty, Penpunt reports, "'grew so rigidly righteous, that the meanest hind among them became a shining light in ither towns an' parishes'"(p.198). While his tale is a comic and ironic comment on the effects of Antinomianism, it clearly offers a sound critique of the dangers within it. Such 'sublime' divinity, it suggests, is inevitably mistaken within the world of lived experience, for it is based in a false attempt to construct the self in absolute terms, a position which opens a way for evil, and the 'overturning' of its exponents. While the inhabitants of Auchtermuchty "'were electrified - they were charmed; they were actually raving mad about the grand and sublime truths delivered to them'", they are, of course, beguiled, for they are offering praise to the forces of evil(p.200/201). As a result, the preacher's one honest argument may be when he tells them they are damned. The villagers learn a healthy lesson when they come to suspect such 'sublime' and absolute rhetorics:

"' Frae that day to this it is a hard matter to gar an Auchtermuchty man listen to a sermon at a', an' a harder ane still to gar him applaud ane, for he thinks aye that he sees the cloven foot peeping out frae aneath ilka sentence.'"(p.203)

Such sublime epistemes, they come to recognise, are at odds with the demands of their own lived experience, and any sermon which claims otherwise may well be a force of the demonic.

Elsewhere also Hogg shows a distrust of the place of absolute systems within the temporal dimension where 'presence' is a totalising imposition. A model of absolute good and absolute evil is, he shows, inappropriate for the world we inhabit, which requires, by its very nature, a more indeterminate and ambivalent framework. This is the implication of *The Three Perils of Woman*, where both Cherubim and Agatha seem



to 'die' from an excess of goodness and the attempt to construct themselves within such absolute boundaries.<sup>26</sup> Faced with the terrifying implications of human experience - jealousy, love and leasing - each woman tries to suppress these disruptive, 'overturning' emotions. Determined to follow what they construe as a righteous path, they 'silence' the human passions in their souls, projecting themselves as models of total goodness. The human condition, however, cannot stand such totality, and Cherubim, who as her name suggests is the more self-sacrificing of the two, literally does expire. Agatha, similarly, slips into a coma for three years only to have good and bad angels wrestle for her soul. The attempt to construct herself in terms of total goodness - beyond human responsibility and outside of its flexible 'grammatical' categories - has, it seems, called into being a binary opposition, where, as in Wringhim's case, 'bad angels' may win control. Agatha's recovery, consequently can only be in the elision of these two extremes as she accepts her own humanity and her equivocal role as a wife and mother.

Gatty is in many ways a later version of the Kilmeny of Hogg's poem, for like her predecessor, Gatty believes herself to have been 'carried away by the fairies'(p.224). In 'Kilmeny' however, it is even more apparent that it is the protagonist's total goodness which is irreconcilable with this world.<sup>27</sup> In an illuminating article on Muriel Spark's *The Prime Of Miss Jean Brodie*, Valerie Shaw has pointed out the relevance of allusions to 'Kilmeny' in that novel. While Kilmeny may be a woman 'as pure as pure can be' Shaw argues, Spark's novel shows that no such creature can be found on this earth.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed while the 'meek and reverend fere' of Hogg's poem has searched the world 'a thousand years and mair', Kilmeny is the first woman 'free of stain in mind and body' he has ever found. It is not surprising, therefore, that Kilmeny should be removed from the physical world to one where epistemic certainties more readily apply. This place of 'perfect forms' - some kind of Platonic ideal - is outside of the 'real' world, or at least the temporal world which we must, for the time being at least, inhabit:

But it seemed as the harp of the sky had rung,  
And the airs of heaven played round her tongue,  
When she spake of the lovely forms she had seen,  
And a land where sin had never been;  
A land of love, and a land of light,  
Withouten sun, or moon, or night;  
Where the river swa'd a living stream,  
And the light a pure celestial beam:  
The land of vision it would seem,  
A still, an everlasting dream.<sup>29</sup>

Not surprisingly, then, after having lived in such an ideal world, where she has seen absolute and allegorical categories of life laid out before her, Kilmeny has no place in the temporal world of 'shadows'. After such an experience her only place can be in this ideal world or 'land of thought' as Hogg calls it:

When a month and a day had come and gane,  
Kilmeny sought the green wood wene;  
There laid her down on the leaves sae green,  
And Kilmeny on earth was never mair seen.  
But O, the words that fell from her mouth,  
Were words of wonder, and words of truth!  
But all the lands were in fear and dread,  
For they kendna whether she was living or dead.  
It wasna her hame, and she couldna remain;  
She left this world of sorrow and pain,  
And returned to the land of thought again.<sup>30</sup>

The 'land of thought' may be an ideal world of the imagination or of the soul where absolute categories can be recreated. Its strange name implies, however, that it may be the type of rigid and binary world system which the misled, like Robert Wringhim, try to create by rhetoric in the temporal dimension in order to escape the 'sorrow and pain' and the uncertainty of real experience.

In 'Kilmeny', Hogg argues that to live in a world of perfect truth and absolute categories - a world of 'presence' - is to live outside the world of human experience. The 'real' world, or the world as we experience it, does not consist of such perfect forms. It is, on the contrary, a more ambiguous property, consisting of 'shadows',

and where 'truth' can only ever be partially, or discursively, revealed. Hogg's religious views, similarly, insist that absolute categories of judgment can only apply outside the temporal dimension, for the world, in its fallen state, demands a more flexible grammar or code.

It is Hogg's religious position, then, and his direct experience and understanding of the dangers of an absolutist Christian model which lead him to challenge inflexible and totalising systems and the binary categories upon which they rest as inadequate frameworks within which to interpret experience - false constructions of 'reality' based on a mistaken view that such 'presence' can ever be achieved in the temporal dimension. 'The totality *has its center elsewhere*' writes Derrida, suggesting that the kind of total code promoted by Wringhim - which figures itself at the centre of a rigid system - is of necessity a false construction.<sup>31</sup>

It is, however, somewhat paradoxical that James Hogg, writing from what is essentially a religious position should reach similar conclusions to those proposed by the post-structuralists, for post-structuralism is essentially a post-Christian (de)construction. Christianity is in fact one of the 'grand narratives' or truth systems, to be discredited by postmodernism, for the inability of language to achieve 'presence' suggests that a stable theistic episteme cannot exist. Religious language is, it is argued, essentially misleading, for it places an emphasis on the 'Word' or 'Logos' as a medium by which we may gain access to religious 'Truth'.

James Hogg and postmodern thought may not, however, be as alien to each other as this would imply.<sup>32</sup> The absolute nature which Calvinism assumed in Scotland serves to divorce its categories of Good and Evil from the vicissitudes of real experience, suggesting that while absolute 'Truth' may exist in some remote ontological dimension, it is inaccessible to those existing in what Heidegger has called the 'ontic', or temporal dimension of daily experience.<sup>33</sup> Calvinism, by laying out its principles in terms of a harsh opposition, creates a disjunction between the binary system it promotes and our experiences of human situations. The binary model is thus

distanced from the Scottish psyche, existing as an abstract principle, but simultaneously recognised as redundant as a model for interpreting life on a daily basis. While 'presence' may exist at one level, it is therefore divorced from any model of daily existence, which is, on the contrary, construed as a world of 'shadows', of discourses, where more ambiguous and flexible models of truth and morality are the only ones which can apply.

Within the temporal world, therefore, totalising and absolute models are seen as inadequate, and experience perceived as more ambivalent and multiplistic than any simple model can account for. The dichotomy which emerges in *The Confessions*, then, between a single and absolute world system and one which perceives experience as a context where the 'game-rules' must be constantly reassessed, is one which figures a similar dislocation. It is also in keeping with Hogg's wider precepts for he was in fact engaged with multi-faceted and ambiguous constructions of experience throughout his career, anxious to assert that they may be a more suitable model for describing 'reality' and experience, than the absolute 'truth systems' of either religious certainty or empiricist thought.

This interest in such a polymorphous view of reality and identity may be perceived in the earliest aspects of Hogg's career, both in *The Poetic Mirror*, and in his journal *The Spy*.<sup>34</sup> Hogg's attempts to parody the greatest living poets in Britain displays a peculiarly fragmented aesthetic personality and his title for the collection confirms this bias towards a multiplistic conception of reality. The purpose of a mirror is, of course, to reflect self back upon the self, but the 'second self' it creates is obviously an illusion of 'presence'. Mirrors, consequently, can be construed as figurally undermining ontological certainties, reminders that the absolute and single nature of the world may be easily and convincingly parodied. Such is indeed the purpose of *The Poetic Mirror*, for there can be no doubt that Hogg produced it to show that while his own poetry might not be considered of the standard of Wordsworth, Scott, and Byron, he could, ironically, fool the public in his imitations of them. Such a love of

trickery runs throughout Hogg's career, into 'The Chaldee Manuscript', and *The Spy*.<sup>35</sup>

The very title of Hogg's journal, *The Spy*, and the attitudes which inform it, themselves give us some clue as to the dissembling which was to mark the magazine. In the first number, Hogg describes the love of disguise which lies behind it:

I have travelled over the greatest part of Britain in various characters, and often got into scrapes extremely embarrassing and ludicrous, some of which I may probably relate by and by.<sup>36</sup>

Such trickery was, indeed, to be the basis of the magazine, for while Hogg has suggested that it was lack of contributors which led him to write 'nearly the half' himself, it seems clear that his love of disguise, of games, and of 'doubled' personalities made this a task particularly suited to his temperament. *The Spy* is almost an exercise in game playing with the Edinburgh literati, for while he did not acknowledge editorship, Hogg repeatedly writes himself into the magazine in disguised forms, thus playing with the idea of any fixed or absolute identity. 'Reality', or at least epistemological manifestations of it, are, in this context, clearly dislocated, for the disguises which Hogg assumes hide the complexities and ontological uncertainties, the 'slippage' which exists beneath them.

Such games with identity are ones which fascinate Hogg, for while *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* may be his masterpiece in the art of 'doubling', similar interests may be found elsewhere. Disguise is also a feature which is used repeatedly in *The Three Perils of Man*, for instance, the novel itself consisting of a form of 'disguised' narrative, for in it Hogg, like Scott, adopts a persona, assuming the role of editor to 'Isaac the Curate'.<sup>37</sup> This device allows him to give up final authority for the narrative, often accounting for the omissions and dislocations in it by the carelessness of his writer. The ontological status of the novel itself is thus called into question, and hence the authority of its narrative fundamentally undermined. Likewise, the status of 'total' grammars for interpreting reality, and epistemes which depend on the empiricism of the senses alone, are also critically

explored in the novel by the instances of disguise which we find in it. Much of the plot of the narrative is generated from such disguise and the resulting, often comic, confusion. 'Cross-dressing' appears as a repeated motif, and one which serves to beguile the senses of the protagonists. Disguise is also the key to its denouement, for both the 'unmasking' of Princess Margaret, and more ludicrously, the disguise of a troop of Scottish soldiers as cattle, serve to bring about its conclusion. The world, this suggests, may not always be as it seems, but may repeatedly beguile the senses, dislocating any empiricist model of it.

Doubling and disguise are also a feature of many of Hogg's short stories, of course, most notably 'The Stange Letter of a Lunatic', which, like *Confessions*, contains a character who assumes a second self.<sup>38</sup> In this story - interestingly based on the familiar 'gothic' trope of the doppelgänger - James Beatman finds himself haunted by a second image, or double, who both claims his actions and denies repeatedly that he is anything other than the 'real' James Beatman. Finding himself in such a situation, Beatman is wholly bemused, and begins, not surprisingly, to question his own reality and ontological status:

Never was there a human creature in such a dilemma as I now found myself. I was conscious of possessing the same body and spirit that I ever did, without any dereliction of my mental faculties. But here was another being endowed with the same personal qualifications, who looked as I looked, thought as I thought, and expressed what I would have said; and more than all seemed to be engaged in every transaction along with me, or did what I should have done and left me out. What was I next to do, for in this state I could not live?<sup>39</sup>

Humorous though Beatman's dilemma may be, Hogg is clearly making a serious point, for, by exploring such 'doubling' in his work he challenges both ontological certainty and our ability to interpret the world by our senses alone. Identity, and by implication the world around us may, he suggests, be a more fluid and ambiguous construction than our rational estimations will allow. "'I dare not tell you what I think'" writes Beatman's friend at the end of the story, "'because these thoughts will not conform to human reason'".<sup>40</sup>

This challenge to any *essential* model of the world and of experience is one which,



again, also figures prominently in *The Confessions*. This is seen clearly in the following trial scene, where, asked if a stolen gown is her mistress's property, Bessy Gillies gives the following rather slippery answer:

'I hae seen ane very like it.'  
'Could you not swear that gown was your mistress's once?'  
'No, unless I saw her hae't on, an' kend that she had paid for't. I am very scrupulous about an oath. *Like* is an ill mark. Sae ill indeed, that I wad hardly swear to ony thing.'  
'But you say that gown is *very like* one your mistress used to wear.  
'I never said sic a thing. It is like one I hae seen her hae out airing on the hay raip i'the back green. It is very like ane I hae seen Mrs Butler in the Grass Market wearing too; I rather think it is the same. Bless you, sir, I wadna swear to my ain fore finger, if it had been as lang out o my sight, an' brought in an' laid on that table.'(p.67)

Bessie's 'flippancy' as the Editor describes it does, of course, provide a comic interlude in this sinister part of the novel, but its more significant purpose seems to be to suggest that empiricism - the search for what is absolutely and essentially true - may be an intrinsically chimerical principle. "Perhaps you are not aware" the judge tells her, "That this scrupulousness of yours is likely to thwart the purposes of justice"(p.67). Be that as it may, Hogg suggests, such justice, as for Scott, is again a 'grand narrative' and may be based on a false truth system, a mistaken 'essentialising' reality.

The supernatural material contained in the novel also challenges an empirical rationale, for it defies description by the rational senses alone. Without this 'fixed' basis from which we might define the world, Hogg explores how we are to describe it. Certainly, the 'ex-centricities', the 'curious details' contained in the narrative push against the boundaries of any essentialist episteme:

'It cannot be in nature, that is quite clear,' said Mrs Logan; 'yet how it should be that I should *think* so, - I who knew him and nursed him from his infancy- there lies the paradox. As you said once before, we have nothing but our senses to depend on, and if you and I believe that we see a person, why, we do see him. Whose word, or whose reasoning can convince us against our senses.(p.84/85)

Similarly, returning to *The Three Perils of Man*, we find much of the supernatural material contained in this novel renders problematic any purely rational explanation.

The inclusion of features like Michael Scott the Wizard, physical transformations and the appearance of the devil in a form very obviously resembling Gil-Martin, clearly serves to undercut any completely rational or metonymic interpretation, an undermining dynamic which Hogg also engages with explicitly in the novel, primarily through the contest between the friar and Michael Scott which takes place during the imprisonment in Aikwood castle. The friar who, we are told, is actually the 'greatest philosopher and chemist of the age, the real inventor of gun-powder, and many other wonderful discoveries', is clearly a man both of science and the Enlightenment(p.152). His 'magic', therefore, can all be rationally explained, seeming to undercut a supernatural mode in the narrative. The 'tricks' he performs are all of the natural order, for his dismissal of Michael Scott's steward in a sheet of fire and brimstone is, after all, only the action of gunpowder, and his conjuring of demonic figures only the effects of 'a magic lantern, a thing never before seen in Scotland'(p.180). Magic, it appears, can thus be explained in terms of rational experience.

This enlightened explanation is, however, one in its own turn challenged, for it emerges that things cannot always be so easily explained. While the friar at first seems to have won his competition with the wizard by cleaving the hill of Cope-Law, the wizard is in the end triumphant. The friar's performance belongs to the rational dimension and is no more than an optical illusion. Michael Scot's cleaving of the hills of Eildon is, however, permanent, and belongs to an altogether different arena of experience, thus bursting through any entirely rational episteme, creating, literally, dislocations and ruptures within it. *The Three Perils of Man* is in the end an indeterminate narrative for it both radically deconstructs a rational system, *and* one based entirely on a supernatural matrix. Experience, in this novel at least, bursts out of such polarities suggesting that truth lies somewhere in the dislocations between these two epistemes. This radical challenge to an essentialist model of experience and any empirical notion of reality is, likewise, also one to the central concepts which formed Enlightenment thought, and which in turn may be said to have shaped

modernity.

The Edinburgh which Hogg inhabited was one steeped in the traditions of that Enlightenment. Douglas Gifford, in his study *James Hogg*, suggests that Hogg's interest in the dual aspect of both identity and reality results from a continual attempt to reconcile his more sceptical and suspicious self with Edinburgh. Certainly, Hogg's career was 'ex-centric', shared as it was between Edinburgh literary circles and his life as a Border sheep farmer. Gifford argues that this attempt is, indeed, what shapes Hogg's career, and suggests that it was the failure of Edinburgh to recognise the importance of Hogg's alternative perspective which gave it its tragic dimension:

He did attempt to reconcile these worlds, to fuse his Border experience with his later awareness that Edinburgh and Scottish literature had strengths and disciplines necessary to his genius. Hogg could see the best in both worlds, but his tragedy lies in the fact that polite literary Edinburgh could see the best as existing only in its own.<sup>41</sup>

Certainly, in terms of Hogg's personal life, Gifford's suggestion seems substantiated, for there can be no doubt that Hogg was at times treated badly by Lockhart, Wilson, and even, although less willfully, Scott. Without question, Hogg himself was aware of such narrow vision on the part of Edinburgh, for in *The Spy*, the 'editor' advises a young shepherd that he will never break into its literary circles:

The literary taste, of Scotland in particular, being thus ruled by a very few, who are formed into two parties, unless you can get listed into one or other of these corps, you cannot get much as yet a chance of appearing in the public.<sup>42</sup>

'Tragic' thought this may have been to Hogg's career in financial terms, however, his ability to 'see the best in both worlds' clearly provided him with a perspective on Enlightenment Edinburgh which shaped the dual perspectives and ex-centric codes formulated in *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. It is also this ex-centric perspective that informs more significant questions in Hogg's novel, for it is clear that the challenges to empiricism and rationality embraced in the structure of *Confessions* are also a challenge to those very ideas current in the Edinburgh of his

time, and by implication, the central tenets of the Enlightenment.

John MacQueen, in his recent publication *The Rise of the Historical Novel*, proposes that the Scottish Enlightenment was not the rational beast which has hitherto been envisaged.<sup>43</sup> Evidence for this, he suggests, may be found both in the so called Enlightenment works themselves, and in the responses to them by writers like Walter Scott, John Galt, and James Hogg himself. The Scottish Enlightenment, he argues, underplays the role of pure reason, leaving more room for emotion, passion, and by implication, a more flexible and ambiguous world model:

The Scottish Enlightenment, in other words, consistently underplayed the importance of systems based on pure reason, and tended to emphasize the limitations of intellect and the importance of the non-rational passions and emotions in its account of the human mind.<sup>44</sup>

Certainly, Hogg seems to have had a distrust of the empirical values which had shaped the Enlightenment. Plain language and reasoned thought, its thinkers believed, could somehow give access to an essential form of knowledge and model of experience. The world, this implied, was a fixed and single entity or essence and it was the business of learning to discover that reality, and record it. Just as the broadly post-structuralist approach to language has questioned such certainty, recognising that language, as an evasive and slippery medium, can never hope to achieve such 'presence', Hogg likewise was sceptical towards such sentiments, for as he describes in *The Confessions*, such a totalising model of the world becomes both distorting and 'monstrous'. As a result, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, may be read not only as a critique of Antinomianism, but also as an exploration of the inadequacy of the empiricist notions which he had seen encapsulated in Edinburgh thought.

It is hardly surprising that Hogg's work should embrace a distrust of such notions, for by the time he came to write *Confessions*, his experience of the Edinburgh Circle and its essentialist claims was one of deception and confusion. Nowhere is this more apparent than in his treatment by *Blackwood's Magazine*, for while it is clear that its

principal contributors Christopher North and Lockhart claimed to be men of empirical and rational thought, much of the 'truth' they presented in the magazine was based in deception and misconstruction. The blatant alteration of Hogg's 'Chaldee Manuscript' in that journal offers one such example, but so too does the deformation of his character in the 'Noctes Ambrosianae'.

These values are, however, undoubtedly those of the Editor of *The Confessions*, for a reader of *Blackwood's*, a friend of Lockhart's, and throughout an acknowledged sceptic towards anything he construes as unreasonable, the Editor's values are clearly those of rationalism and empiricism. For him, the world can be both interpreted and recorded in terms of a single and fixed model of reality, for as he announces from the start, his rationale is to explain his material rationally, and to substantiate it with evidence:

And this being all I can gather of the family from history, to tradition I must appeal for the remainder of the motley adventures of that house. But of the matter furnished by the latter of these powerful monitors, I have no reason to complain: It has been handed down to the world in unlimited abundance; and I am certain, that in recording the hideous events which follow, I am only relating to the greater inhabitants of at least four centuries of Scotland, matters of which they were before perfectly well informed.(p.1)

For the Editor, history is set in opposition to tradition, 'evidence' with 'curious detail', the first having the authority of empirical fact, while the second belongs to a more dubious category. Similarly, he draws a sharp distinction between the rational and the irrational, dismissing much of Wringham's 'Confessions' as the ravings of a 'deluded creature'.

This empiricism, and its collorary desire to explain the world only in terms of facts perceived by the senses, was, of course, a guiding principle of the Enlightenment. Not surprisingly then, it is a principle taken to the point of parody in the character of the Editor of Hogg's *Confessions*. This principle leads him to contextualise or 'silence' the supernatural dimension in his own narrative, and so also governs his response to George Colwan's experiences on Arthur's Seat. This episode, perhaps more than any other in the novel, suggests the actual presence of the supernatural, and

the Editor's initial description of the event captures much of its horror:

George started, and his hair stood up in bristles as he gazed on this horrible monster. He saw every feature, and every line of the face, distinctly, as it gazed on him with an intensity that was hardly brookable. Its eyes were fixed on him, in the same manner as those of some carnivorous animal fixed on its prey; and yet there was fear and trembling, in these unearthly features, as plainly depicted as murderous malice. The giant apparition seemed sometimes to be cowering down as in terror, so that nothing but its brow and eyes were seen; still these never turned one moment from their object- again it rose imperceptibly up, and began to approach with great caution; and as it neared, the dimensions of its form lessened, still continuing, however, far above the natural size.(p.41)

Here, the semiotic - a 'monstrous', ex-centric aspect of experience - breaks through into the text. However, while the Editor may describe Wringham as 'devilish', and 'hellish looking', he is reluctant to admit any supernatural implication and immediately attempts to explain the passage within his own rational discourse. The episode, consequently, already offered within a dubious ontology of 'tradition', is quickly paralleled by Adam Gordon's suggestion that it may be explained as a natural phenomenon:

He tried to convince him, that at all events there could be nothing supernatural in the circumstances; and that the vision he had seen on the rock, among the thick mist, was the shadow of his brother approaching behind him.(p.46)

Adam Gordon's trip to the Highlands to substantiate this natural explanation is conveniently, however, abortive, leaving the Editor with no possibility for the failure of such a rational interpretation. The Editor himself, on the other hand, leaves no stone which might support his essentialist code unturned. His response to the *Blackwood's* article 'A Scot's Mummy' is, consequently, the physical attempt to dig up the body.<sup>45</sup> Such an action is clearly a parody of empiricism, for it involves the literal digging up of old bones in the attempt to discover the essential truth, and to confirm it with his own senses. The Editor is of course, not satisfied by mere textual evidence, for, as he claims, he has been tricked by *Blackwood's* in the past:

The letter from which the above is an extract, is signed JAMES



HOGG, and dated from Altrive Lake, *August 1st*, 1823. It bears the stamp of authenticity in every line; yet, so often had I been hoaxed by the ingenious fancies displayed in that Magazine, that when this relation met my eye, I did not believe it; but from the moment I perused it, I half formed the resolution of investigating these wonderful remains personally, if any such existed; for, in the immediate vicinity of the scene, as I supposed, I knew of more attractive metal than the dilapidated remains of mouldering suicides.(p.245)

Not surprisingly, this empirical response is one rejected by the James Hogg whom the Editor meets in *The Confessions*. The Hogg who has written to *Blackwood's* has himself shown little interest in the physical remnants which accompany the story, and was not a member of the original party who exhumed the body. He has too, given away his portions of the suicide's clothing, and sends the last vestiges of it to the editor of the magazine. The fictional Hogg, likewise, who appears with all the trickery of Fowles in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, or Gray in *Lanark*, has little interest in such a search for factual evidence, and spurns the approaches of the Editor:<sup>46</sup>

His two friends then requested him to accompany us to the spot, and to take some of his shepherds with us to assist in raising the body; but he spurned at the idea, saying, 'Od bless ye, lad! I have ither matters to mind'. (p.247)

This Hogg has little interest in the essentialist values favoured by the Editor. Such values are, the novel has shown, based on a false search for 'knowledge', a rigid truth and certainty that may lead, like Robert's, to the dangerous totalities of dissembling rhetoric.

Certainly, while the Editor may claim that his narrative is offered with the objectivity of empiricism and plain language, it is clear that, like all such epistemes, it may be deconstructed. This is what emerges if we look more closely at the Editor's position, for it his empiricist stance is one itself called into question in the course of the novel. While 'absolute truth' and fact may be his principles the Editor's discourse conceals slippages and dislocations. This can be illustrated at the most fundamental of levels, for his account of the 'Scot's Mummy' article which he claims is reprinted from *Blackwood's Magazine* in fact withholds information offered in the original. The

original letter, as it was sent by Hogg to *Blackwood's*, includes satirical material against the magazine itself, and Christopher North in particular. While it would have been well known to contemporary readers, this material does not appear in the Editor's version. So too, the general tone of Hogg's letter is much more tongue in cheek, and notably less rational about the whole incident, willing to accept the ex-centric perspective it clearly offers. Such alterations may seem minor, but in the light of the Editor's empiricist position, they are, indeed, significant, for they suggest that behind the Editor's supposed objectivity lies his position as a supporter of *Blackwood's*, and one reluctant to offend its sensibilities. 'There are no facts, only interpretations', and not surprisingly the Editor's narrative emerges not as an unbiased account, but as itself a discourse, with its own ideological precepts lying in the dislocations and slippages within it.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly dislocative is his handling of any supernatural material in the novel. The Enlightenment approach obviously allowed no room for such aspects of experience, believing that they could always be explained in terms of rationalism and reason. The Editor, consequently, seeks to silence or suppress any hint of the supernatural in the 'Confessions', attempting to undermine this semiotic aspect and subvert its authority, containing it within some rationalistic frame. This is the impulse behind his suggestion that the 'Confessions' must be an 'allegory' or a 'parable', yet so menacing is the account which Robert gives that his material bursts free from the Editor's neat boundaries.

Such slippages and gaps concealed within his narrative serve to radically undermine the Editor's empiricist position. This subversion is confirmed by more basic questions surrounding the transmission of Wringhim's 'Confessions'. While the Editor places a great store on history, authority, and factual detail, it is clear that the document he presents has hardly reached him in the most authoritative of conditions. Damp, rotten and mouldering, one cannot imagine that Wringhim's pamphlet was easy to decipher:

We were all curious to see what sort of a pamphlet such a person would read; what it could contain that he seemed to have such a care about? for the slough in which it was rolled, was fine chamois leather;

what colour it had been, could not be known. But the pamphlet was wrapped so close together, and so damp, rotten, and yellow, that it seemed one solid piece. We all concluded, from some words that we could make out, that it was a religious tract, but that it would be impossible to make any thing of it.(p.252)

The Editor, however, suppresses the implications of this apparent problem. Likewise, in spite of the fact that he acknowledges his intention to alter the title, and we might suspect, make other alterations, he gives the document to his readers as 'an original document of a most singular nature, and preserved for their perusal in a still more singular manner', concluding that he 'offered no remarks on it, and made a few additions' (p.93). Again his document is given an empirical authority which, it is clear, it does not warrant.

The empirical approach as it is presented in the Editor is one, therefore, which may be easily deconstructed, for behind it lies a set of presumptions which lead him to 'silence' certain aspects of the account, and hide the ideological bias which lies within his narrative. 'Truth', the novel suggests, cannot be contained within the boundaries of the Editor's position, but constantly erupts from his rational categories as something altogether more ambiguous and problematic, as *différance*.

Clearly then, it should not surprise us that Hogg should resist an empirical and essentialist episteme within his own fiction. A challenge to any essentialist model of experience is clearly reflected in the narrative strategies of virtually all his fictions and is evident in the narrative structure of 'The Strange Letter of a Lunatic', for instance. This story is told in the form of a letter sent to a 'Mr James Hogg of Mount Berger', and by this framing itself, authority for the tale is called into question, and the supernatural material and unsettling vision it offers contextualized.<sup>48</sup> By using this device, then, Hogg immediately unsettles the ontological status of the story, subverting the readers expectations of how he or she is to regard the material which it contains. Similar strategies are also to be found in other of Hogg's short stories, of course, for he was interested in narrative experimentation throughout his career. Repeatedly, this experimentation takes the form of framed narrative and embedding, reflexive devices which serve to call into question the status of the material being

presented and undermine its claim to authority, a strategy adopted at length in *The Brownie Of Bodsbeck*.

In part, this narrative embedding in Hogg's work stems from a concern with the preservation of an oral tradition, an interest which was to last throughout his career, for his story-telling origins were in the rich oral sources of the Borders and his first contact with the Edinburgh Circle was in his meeting with Scott in connection with *The Border Minstrelsey*.<sup>49</sup> Such an interest helps to explain his persistent concern with the tale form, and the fact that so much of his fiction appeals to an oral tradition for both its sources and authority. And so, in *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*, the narrator acknowledges this authority as the basis of much of his information:

The narrator of this tale confesses that he has taken this account of his raid through the vales of Esk and Annan solely from tradition, as well as the attack made on the two coventicles, where the Pringles, etc. were taken prisoners.(p.105)

Such an interest in the oral tradition also leads to experimentation with language, and perhaps the reason why *The Brownie of Bodsbeck* is unfortunately so seldom read lies in its use of an oral form rooted in Borders Scots. Indeed, Hogg, in contrast to his friend Scott, provides much more of his fiction in the Scots language and his work is marked by the fact that not only dialogue, but actual narrative appears in it.<sup>50</sup> While the impulse of these features may have lain in the oral tradition, however, it is clear that by appealing to it Hogg subverts the status of his own fictions, dislocating them from the rationalistic epistemic codes of Enlightenment authority. The folk tradition belongs to a more dubious ontology and one which correspondingly dislocates the status of his texts.

Hogg's grounding in the oral traditon also leads to more self-conscious and reflexive experimentation, manifested, for instance, in Hogg's presentation of chronology, for emphasis is moved away from linear narration to a much more fluid form. Hogg discusses the way in which the demands of the oral tradition require such deviation within *The Brownie of Bodsbeck* itself:

It is necessary to mention all these, as they were afterwards canvassed at Walter's trial, the account of which formed one of his winter evening tales as long as he lived. Indeed, all such diffuse and miscellaneous matter as is contained in this chapter, is a great incumbrance in the right onward progress of a tale; but we have done with it, and shall now haste to the end of our narrative in a direct uninterrupted line.(p.112)

Such a disruption of accepted chronology is also expressed in *The Three Perils of Woman*, for while in that series Hogg does, in fact, do very little to disrupt linear narration, an unease with linear models is expressed in the idea of the distinct parts of the novel falling into 'Circles' rather than the more usual 'chapters'. The concept again suggests the idea of narration as a fluid and evolving discourse rather than as a strict linear progression, with thought as an equivocating, rather than a developing, process. Circles, certainly, do not lead to centres, but repeatedly offer varying perspectives - new game-rules - on familiar contexts.

These devices, originating in his experiences of the oral tradition, are then clearly in accord with Hogg's distrust of totalising models of thought and with a desire to suggest more ambiguous and flexible grammars for describing experience. Linear models are revealed in *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*, as inadequate, for the story teller, as opposed to the 'author', finds it necessary to see different strands of experience as concurrent, thus undercutting any straightforward or simple linear narration:

Walter never went further with his story straightonward than this; for it began to involve family concerns, which he did not much like to recount. He had a number of abstract stories about the Covenanters and their persecutors; but as I must proceed with the narrative as I gathered it from others, these will be interwoven in their due course.(p.24)

This concern with the inability of linear narrative to provide an accurate or appropriate grammar by which to describe experience is also a question which Hogg explores in *The Three Perils of Man*. Incorporating a story-telling competition where the characters, Scheherazade-like, must tell stories by which to evade their own deaths, *The Three Perils of Man* provides opportunity for much debate on a proper method of narration. Not surprisingly, no final conclusion can be reached among the



competitors, but nevertheless the device allows Hogg both to include these wonderfully 'ex-centric' tales, and to reflexively discuss the nature of story-telling. Thus the competitors denounce deviation from the linear 'norm' Deil's Tam's tale being condemned because he 'falls through it', straying away from the main point of the narrative, and becoming, as Gibby describes it 'merely an offputting of time', though there is in fact, it transpires, no truly secure 'norm' from which to deviate(p.276). Whilst Tam's tale is certainly far from linear, causing the friar to wonder at the extent to which it meanders:

'Lo, the tale is good', said the friar; 'but it goeth here and there, without bound or limit; and wherefore should not a man relate all that befalleth unto him. I suppose it behoveth our friend to go on, without turning aside to the right hand or to the left.'(p.276)

Tam's life is we learn, more surprising and diverse than linear narration can accomodate and the novel as a whole suggests that any account of experience cannot be contained within a straightforward linear framework. On the contrary, the novel itself is a series of divergences from its main narrative, the seige of Roxburgh Castle, which quickly gives way to the secondary narrative, the envoy to Aikwood. In turn, this secondary narrative incorporates many digressions, among them the stories narrated under the auspices of the competition itself.

By this strategy, Hogg suggests that experience cannot be accommodated by any straightforward linear model, but constantly bursts out of the boundaries of a totalising and rigid epistemic framework. Like Scott and Stevenson he describes such narration using the metaphor of the journey, suggesting that the travels of 'real' experience cannot be linear ones:

These casual separations of *dramatis personae* are exceedingly unfortunate for the story-teller who aims at conciseness and brevity; because it is impracticable to bring them all on at the same time. A story is like a waggoner and his horses travelling out at the highway, his machine loaden with various bales of rich merchandise. He goes smoothly and regularly on, till he comes to the bottom of a steep ascent, where he is obliged to leave a great proportion of his loading, and first carry one part of it to the top of the hill, then another, and then another, which retards him grievously on his way. So it is with the writer of a true story such as this; and the separation of parties is as



'Truth', Hogg suggests, is more ambiguous and multiplistic than anything which can be contained in the straightforward 'telos' of orthodox narration, but rather demands a more indeterminate epistemological model.

This indeterminacy is reflected in the lack of closure characterising Hogg's fictions. In the less sophisticated of Hogg's work this is at times manifested in a tendency simply to almost perversely dissolve into banality. Elsewhere, however, Hogg displays a more highly wrought attempt to dissipate conclusion. In the first part of *The Three Perils of Woman*, for example, the end of the novel fragments into the form of letters, themselves mediated through the hands of a solicitor. Closure is thus evaded, broken up from a single point of rest or centre to a series of alternative positions. Similar reluctance to bring narrative to any fixed resting place may be discerned in *The Brownie of Bodsbeck* where in the end final decisions and conclusions are passed out of the hands of the narrator and into those of the reader:

If there are any incidents in this Tale that may still appear a little mysterious, they will all be rendered obvious by turning to a pamphlet entitled, A CAMERONIAN'S TALE, or *The Life of John Brown, written by himself*. But any reader of common ingenuity may very easily solve them all. (p.168)

This conclusion is clearly enigmatic. On the one hand, the reader is referred to another text, thus postponing solution or 'presence'; on the other, he is told that knowledge resides within the text itself - posited in its own dislocations and ruptures, within its multivalent conclusions.

This is a technique which is also employed in *The Three Perils of Man*, where what appear to be the main narrative lines are often in the end frustrated. The narrator creates tensions, which, rather than reaching any final denouement, are on the contrary repeatedly deferred. The main framework of the novel, for example, is formed around the siege of Roxburgh Castle. Tension is created around its outcome, and the opposition which develops between Douglas and Musgrave. The climax of this

narrative thread is, however, side-tracked in the novel, both by Musgrave's premature suicide, and by the fact that it is Ringan Redhough rather than Douglas who eventually takes the castle. The opposition upon which the novel is seen to rest is thus revealed as an artificial one, and what has appeared to be the main narrative line is, by this strategy, quickly passed over:

The expedition of the Douglas against Musgrave is, like the innumerable Border battles of that reign, only shortly mentioned by historians; and although it was a notable encounter, and is detailed by Isaac at great length, it lies out of our way here. Let it suffice that they skirmishd cautiously for two days with various success, and at last came to an engagement on a field right opposite to the junction of the Tweed and Gala.(p.382)

A similar evasion also takes place in the sub-plot. While those gathered in Aikwood Castle tell stories to decide who, on the one hand, will be killed for food, and who, on the other, will win the hand of Delany, this outcome never materialises. Delany in the end marries the one man who has loved her from the outset and help comes, thankfully, before the company must resort to cannibalism. The stories, consequently, are offered not as a step forward in narration, or as part of a 'teleological' move towards a final destination, but merely as an end in themselves - a way of exploring the context of the narrative - and for a love of story-telling, for *playing* within the text.

Narrative experimentation in Hogg's work, therefore, both in its disruption of linear progression and of closure, defeats the rigid search for essence and presence, revelling, rather, in the more evasive ontology of the text itself. As a result of these strategies both final meaning and denouement is postponed and authority avoided, as Hogg, setting his novels and stories within framed narratives and open-ended discourses, continually avoids fixing them into any final or total form.<sup>52</sup> Nowhere in Hogg's work, however, are such strategies found with the sophistication employed in the *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, and it is to this work that any conclusion must return.

As elsewhere in Hogg's work, experimentation in *Confessions* is focused upon narrative perspective and techniques which seek to defeat authority and closure. The novel provides in its shared narration between the Editor and Robert Wringhim's 'Confessions' the most supreme example of framed narrative to be found in Hogg's fiction. By this device, Hogg provides alternative discourses, which serve to undermine and undercut each other, to produce a text where authority, and by implication final meaning, or 'presence' is continually subverted and deferred. The dual narration in Hogg's *Confessions* thus serves to subvert both the final 'presence' of closure, and the ability of language and narrative to attain such a centre.<sup>53</sup>

This is, of course, achieved in the novel by juxtaposing the accounts offered by Wringham and the Editor. As a result of this dislocation, the ideologies which shape each episteme are revealed, and their claims as total systems subverted. An example of this process is provided by the murder of George Colwan. The Editor's description is, typically, one which gives only the most circumstantial of evidence and reports only those facts which may be substantiated. It is, therefore, the briefest of accounts, reporting how George was called out of the tavern, and his body later discovered. Robert's description, on the other hand, gives far more detail, but is, not surprisingly, an episode in self-justification, interpreting what happens as the work of heaven against a sinner:

The duel was fierce; but the might of heaven prevailed, and not my might. The ungodly and reprobate young man fell, covered with wounds, and with curses and blasphemy in his mouth, while I escaped uninjured. There-to his power extended not.(p.171)

Robert admits, however, in turn, that this is not his own perception of the evening, but one suggested to him by Gil-Martin. Within the secondary frame of this framed narrative truth becomes both complex and evasive and, it is clear, a matter of discourse, or 'narrative' perspective:

I will not deny, that my own immediate impressions of this affair in some degree differed from this statement. But this is precisely as my illustrious friend described it to me afterwards, and I can rely implicitly

on his information, as he was at that time a looker-on, and my senses all in a state of agitation, and he could have no motive for saying what was not the positive truth.(p.171)

Secondary framing similarly occurs within the Editor's account, for while he may offer only the most circumstantial of evidence he includes also a more supernatural interpretation. This interpretation, typically, hinting as it does at the presence of demonic forces at George's murder is provided 'second-hand', in an account by Bell Calvert.

As already noted, this is typical of Hogg's handling of all material which suggests a supernatural or semiotic dimension. Both in the Editor's narration, as in Robert's own, attempts to describe the events which take place in the novel within a supernatural framework, are always equivocal, handed over to the 'folk' characters who are more willing to believe such interpretations. Typical in this respect is Penpunt's account of the incidents at Auchtermuchty. Penpunt clearly is 'telling a story', for his tale contains crows discussing the devil's presence thus offering parallels with the ballad tradition. Likewise its moral, by placing it in the realm of parable or fable clearly announces itself as part of the 'story' form. In addition, his narrative is given a second narrative frame, for it is, he claims, a tale he has heard from an old woman. By the manipulation of such strategies, the only narrative point at which a profound, unambiguous belief in the physical presence of the supernatural is offered, is framed in the ambivalent form of oral tradition. Authority for it is, consequently, subverted, leaving the reader uncertain as to how far he should accept such an interpretation. Of course, this multivalence is at the heart of Hogg's fiction, for such material clearly unsettles any entirely rational episteme, constantly undercutting its essentialist and rigid boundaries. Within such frames and secondary frames 'truth' does not consist of a prewritten code, but lies within a web of discourses, irreducibly impossible to locate.

Endless debates on the question of whether Gil-Martin is portrayed as a manifestation of Robert's deranged psyche, or as a physical manifestation of the devil, therefore, seem of secondary significance. There is, of course, no way of being

certain as we read the novel, for each interpretation is in turn evaded and undermined. 'Binary' readings of the novel, which seek final conclusions in it are arguably finally inadequate as methods for interpreting the material which we read, the structure and narrative material of the novel itself undercutting secure interpretive structures suggesting that nothing in the world of lived experience - or within discourse - can be known with absolute certainty.

There is then, much in the novel which cannot be explained by such purely rational interpretive grammars. In the end, this is the result of Hogg's 'ex-centric', 'curious' narrations, reaching no conclusions, and with their multiple layers of narrative, providing no resting place of interpretive security where we as readers may deduce one. *The Confessions*, as the finest expression of these attributes in Hogg's fiction, becomes, then, as the Editor suggests, a novel which offers only a series of questions, not irreducible truth, but an irreducible indeterminacy:

What can this work be? Sure, you will say, it must be an allegory; or (as the writer calls it) a religious PARABLE, showing the dreadful danger of self-righteousness? I cannot tell. Attend to the sequel: which is a thing so extraordinary, so unprecedented, and so far out of the common course of human events, that if there were not hundreds of living witnesses to attest the truth of it, I would not bid any rational being believe it.(p.240)

The extraordinary sequel, however, proves little and has, it should be noted, not hundreds but only a few witnesses to attest to it. The novel leaves the reader with no clear way of making a final judgement, leaving any entirely 'rational' being with an impossible interpretive task. As Wringhim's 'Confessions' and the Editor's comment seem to undermine and subvert each other, neither 'total' construction can be adequate as a system within which to interpret the narrative before us. The 'truth', finally, lies only in an elision of these two systems, in the 'slippage' somewhere between Robert's and the Editor's two extremes.

In its structure and thematic concerns, therefore, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* launches an assault against totalising and simplistic world models, suggesting that they may be grammars or epistemes incapable of dealing with the irreducible 'ex-centricity' inseparable from experience. Temporal, contingent

existence is, the novel suggests, uncertain, ambiguous, and impossible to confine within any simple narrative telos or neat closure. On the contrary, it breaks free of such systems, subverting any total model we seek to impose upon it. The narrative impulses in the novel thus resist the totalising tenets proposed by Wringhim within it, refusing to settle inside false and dangerously misleading boundaries of 'reality'. Empiricism is then, finally unsettled as a valid 'grammar' by the novel itself which remains unresolved, problematic and ontologically ambivalent, constantly pushing against the edges of its dual perspectives. 'Truth' in Hogg's novel lies somewhere in the dislocations between them - its double narration constantly deferring and postponing, irreducibly indeterminate.

Towards the end of his life, Robert Wringhim describes how he is captured within the threads of a loom. Unlike the slender, delicate, and of course easily broken web by which George is embraced earlier in the novel, the loom which captures Robert is rigid and unyielding:

My feet had slipped down through the double warpings of a web, and not being able to reach the ground with them, (there being a small pit below,) I rode upon a number of yielding threads, and there being nothing else that I could reach, to extricate myself was impossible. I was utterly powerless; and besides, the yarn and cords hurt me very much. For all that, the destructive weaver seized a loomspoke, and began a-beating me most unmercifully, while, entangled as I was, I could do nothing but shout aloud for mercy, or assistance, whichever chanced to be within hearing.(p.216)

In the context of this discussion, the significance of these paralleled metaphors should be clear. George's web, based on a fluid and ambiguous system merely blesses without ensnaring. Robert's on the other hand is a rigid and unyielding framework. Captured within it, Robert can do nothing to escape, but becomes increasingly entangled in his own mesh of reasoning and counter reasoning. In the end he becomes, not surprisingly, completely inverted, for rather than providing truth, his absolute values serve only to trap him in a dangerously intractable version of reality. Such a totalising framework can only be a destructive one: beneath it lies the gaping



mouth of a pit and the capacity, perhaps, for indescribable evil.

In this metaphor Hogg most powerfully figures the exploration of absolute systems which he offers in the novel. Systems, which, rather than providing access to truth, distort the discursive and evasive 'reality' of experience. 'I will overturn, overturn, overturn', says the devil in the Auchtermuchty sermon, suggesting that those rigid systems adopted by its residents provide the potential for a use of reasoning and language which supports the most obtuse and dangerous positions. Such models for describing the world are, as Lyotard argues, terrifying, and in their place Hogg suggests a more liberating model of experience: one which acknowledges that 'truth' may not be contained within a totalising grammar, but is posited within a multiplicity of perspectives and a mesh of discourses which in the end, at least in human experience, may have no centre, no final resting place. While such 'webs' cannot offer the moral certainty of Robert's rigid system, they offer a freedom from those like Gil-Martin who seek to ensnare.

It is precisely such attitudes, as they are displayed not only in *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* but throughout his fiction, which suggest that Hogg's work may be usefully reappraised in a broadly postmodern context. Postmodern thought incorporates within itself a challenge to the Enlightenment concepts which have shaped modernity; that Hogg, reacting directly to the immediate products of that Enlightenment as he experienced them in Edinburgh should share their scepticism is hardly surprising. To such attitudes Hogg brings his own alternative, 'ex-centric' experience and narrative modes. The radical textualizing of 'reality' which results, refusing to be contained within the boundaries of absolute interpretive systems and epistemological certainties, challenges, and finally overturns the authority of such systems as 'grammars' for a post-Enlightenment world.

### Notes to Chapter 3

- 1 André Gide, 'Introduction', *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, translated by Dorothy Bussy (New York, 1959), p.xiii.
- 2 John Wain, 'Introduction', *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p.24.
- 3 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, *Theory and History of Literature*, 10 (Manchester, 1984), p.81.
- 4 James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner: Written by Himself: with a Detail of Curious Traditionary Facts and Other Evidence by the Editor*, edited by John Carey (London, 1969).  
All references are to this edition. Where the text referred to is apparent, page numbers will be given in brackets after quotation.
- 5 For a good description of the heresy see the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, I, p.458. It should be noted that Antinomianism, while persistent in Scotland, was never condoned by either Calvin or the Church. The seeds of the heresy are, however, to be found in St. Paul. See 'Letter to the Romans' 6. Paul states 'What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?' (6:1), and continues, 'What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace?' (6:15). While St. Paul refutes the heresy saying 'God Forbid', it was on this foundation that the Antinomians were to build their creed.
- 6 See Louis Simpson, *James Hogg: A Critical Study* (Edinburgh, 1962), p.171 for more information.  
It should be noted that Thomas Boston's relationship with Antinomianism is somewhat ambiguous. He did, however, reintroduce Edward Fisher's *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, and would have been well acquainted with its tenets.
- 7 Robert Burns 'Holy Willie's Prayer', in *Poems and Songs*, edited by James Kinsley (Oxford, 1969), pp.56-59 (p.57).  
For a full discussion of Hogg's passion for Burns see Alan Lang Strout, *The Life and Letters of James Hogg* (Texas, 1946).
- 8 For a more detailed account of the connections between Enlightenment thought and modernity see Chapter 1.
- 9 'Damnatory creed' is a term coined by R.L.Stevenson to describe the more harsh face of Calvinism. See Chapter 4 for more details.
- 10 James Hogg, 'To Parents', in *A Series of Lay Sermons on Good Principles and Good Breeding by the Ettrick Shepherd* (London, 1834), pp.180-216 (p.180).  
While Hogg's sermons have frequently been dismissed as a late money making venture, they contain some illuminating material in relation to his fiction.
- 11 This debate is, of course, a familiar one, and one which troubled early criticism. It is now critically acknowledged, however, that no answer can be finally reached.
- 12 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford, 1953). Wittgenstein proposes that language operates not by virtue of the fact that sign and signifier are intrinsically linked, but by virtue of

'grammar'. Rules are thus worked out 'in context', and can be changed according to circumstances.

- 13 James Hogg, 'Sound Morality', in *Selected Stories and Sketches*, edited by Douglas Mack (Edinburgh, 1982), pp.121-132.
- 14 James Hogg, *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*, edited by Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh, 1976).  
All references are to this edition. Where the text referred to is apparent, page numbers will be given in brackets after quotation.
- 15 Douglas Mack outlines this reading of *The Brownie of Bodsbeck* in his introduction to the above edition of the novel. To some extent it is based on a misreading of Scott's *Old Mortality* which provides a far more ambiguous response to the Covenanting question than this would suggest.
- 16 See Douglas Gifford, *James Hogg* (Edinburgh, 1976), p.157 for a good psychological reading of the novel.
- 17 See Chapter 2 for a full discussion of Scott's *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*.
- 18 Hogg was a member of this strange club during his time in Edinburgh between 1810 and 1814. The club, which followed the notion that any proposal by a member should be accepted 'right or wrong', must have given Hogg a peculiar idea of the purposes to which reasoning and argument might be used.  
Hogg's relationship with the *Blackwood's Circle* was always an uneasy one. His treatment by both John Lockhart and Christopher North was far from fair, for they regarded him with both contempt and humour.  
For a full discussion see Gifford, p.228.
- 19 James Hogg, *A Tour of the Highlands in 1803: A Series of Letters by James Hogg, The Ettrick Shepherd, Addressed to Sir Walter Scott* (Edinburgh, 1986), p.66.
- 20 L.L.Lee, 'The Devil's Figure: James Hogg's *Justified Sinner*', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 3 (1966), pp.230-239 (p.236).  
Ian Campbell, 'Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*', *Liturgical Review*, 2 (1972), pp.28-33 (p.30).
- 21 Edward Fisher, 'Preface', *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, edited by Thomas Boston (17th edition, Glasgow, 1781), p.21.
- 22 Douglas Gifford, p.154.
- 23 James Hogg, 'Good Breeding', in *A Series of Lay Sermons*, pp.67-101 (p.71/72).
- 24 James Hogg, 'Virtue the Only Source of Happiness', in *A Series of Lay Sermons*, pp.217-245 (p.218).
- 25 James Hogg, 'Mr Adamson of Laverhope' in *Selected Stories and Sketches*, pp.22-40 (p.36).
- 26 James Hogg, *The Three Perils of Woman: or Love, Leasing and Jealousy*, 3 vols (London, 1823).  
All references are to this edition. Where the text referred to is apparent, page numbers will be given in brackets after quotation.
- 27 James Hogg, 'Kilmeny', in *Selected Poems and Songs*, edited by David Groves (Edinburgh, 1986), pp.22-30.

- 28 Valerie Shaw, 'Muriel Spark', in *The History of Scottish Literature*, 4 vols, edited by Cairns Craig (Aberdeen, 1987-1988), IV, edited by Cairns Craig (1987), pp.277-290.
- 29 'Kilmeny', p.23. The 'land of thought' clearly resembles the 'ideal' world of Plato's *Republic*, for it is a place of perfect forms. However for Hogg it is clearly divorced from our experience, and as such, can have no place in our models of how to deal with it.
- 30 'Kilmeny', p.30.
- 31 Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (London, 1978), pp.278-293 (p.279).
- 32 There are many studies of the relationship between Calvinism and art. Glenda Norquay's thesis 'Moral Absolutism in the Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins and Muriel Spark: Challenges to Realism' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Edinburgh, 1985) offers some interesting comment.
- 33 Martin Heidegger adopts this phrase to describe the non-absolute dimension of lived experience. For a full discussion see Hilary Lawson, *Reflexivity: The Post-modern Predicament* (London, 1985), pp.58-89 (p74).
- 34 James Hogg, *The Poetic Mirror, Or the Living Bards of Britain* (Great Britain, 1816).  
For a good insight into this point see Antony J. Hasler, 'Ingenious Lies: *The Poetic Mirror* in Context' in *Papers Given at the Second James Hogg Society Conference*, edited by Gillian Hughes (Aberdeen, 1988), pp.79-96.  
  
*The Spy*, edited by James Hogg (Edinburgh, 1810-1811).  
*The Spy* ran on a weekly basis for fifty- two editions.
- 35 James Hogg, 'Translation from an Ancient Chaldee Manuscript', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 2 (1817), pp.89-96.
- 36 James Hogg, *The Spy*, no.1 (1 September, 1810), p.3.
- 37 James Hogg, *The Three Perils of Man: War, Women and Witchcraft*, edited by Douglas Gifford (Edinburgh and London, 1972).  
All references will be to this edition and where the text referred to is apparent, page numbers will be given in brackets after quotation.
- 38 James Hogg, 'The Stange Letter of a Lunatic', in *Selected Stories and Sketches*, pp.158-168.
- 39 'The Stange Letter of a Lunatic', p.164.
- 40 'The Stange Letter of a Lunatic', p.167.
- 41 Douglas Gifford, p.28.
- 42 James Hogg, *The Spy*, no.12 (November, 1812), p.91.
- 43 John MacQueen, *The Rise of the Historical Novel, The Enlightenment and Scottish Literature*, 2 (Edinburgh, 1989).
- 44 John MacQueen, p.12.

- 45 James Hogg, 'A Scot's Mummy', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 14 (August, 1823), pp.188-190.
- 46 John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (London, 1969).  
 Alasdair Gray, *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* (Edinburgh, 1981).  
 Both these novels include the appearance of a narrator who in some way reflects the author himself. This postmodern device is a typical method of unsettling the status of both the author and authority.
- 47 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power: An Attempted Transvaluation of All Values*, translated by Anthony M. Ludovici, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, edited by Oscar Levy, 18 vols (Edinburgh and London, 1909-1910), XV (1910) sec. 481, p.12.
- 48 This is of course, Hogg's own address.
- 49 *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border: Consisting of Historical and Romantic Ballads, Collected in the Southern Countries of Scotland: With a Few of Modern Date, Founded upon Local Tradition*, edited by Walter Scott, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1802-1803).
- 50 See Emma Letley, 'Some Literary uses of Scots in Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* and *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*', in *Papers Given at the First James Hogg Society Conference*, edited by Gillian Hughes (Stirling, 1983), pp.29-39.
- 51 Further elaboration of this point may be found in Chapters 2 and 4 which deal with the work of Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson.
- 52 For further discussion of this point see Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York, 1967).
- 53 Such non-closure has led to criticism of the novel both in the earlier part of this century and in more recent times. See for example Alan Lang Strout, p.261 and Julie Fenwick, 'Psychological and Narrative Determinism in James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*', *Scottish Literary Journal*, 15, no.1 (May,1988), pp.61-69 (p.68).

**CHAPTER 4:**  
**'TO TRAVEL HOPEFULLY': GRAMMARS OF LIFE AND THE MORAL**  
**TOPOGRAPHY OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON**



Of all three writers under reassessment in this thesis, critical responses to the work of Robert Louis Stevenson have been the most equivocal in the twentieth century. While acknowledgement of Scott's centrality to the development of the novel may have waned with Leavis's rejection of him from the 'great tradition', appreciation of his place as a writer of some importance has persisted. Criticism of James Hogg's work has, to some extent, as pointed out in the previous chapter, only begun since a 'postmodern' framework of thought has come to appreciate the qualities he offers. Stevenson's reputation however is somewhat more complicated, for while one branch of criticism may, as Alastair Fowler points out, have persistently 'fired him from the canon' for writing in forms considered 'low', an alternative position is adopted by postmodernist writers who claim to have taken inspiration from him.<sup>1</sup>

What is unquestionable is that in his own lifetime Stevenson's work was both admired and appreciated.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in spite of his exile in the south seas, he remained at the heart of British literary interest, as both his continued friendship with Henry James and his many literary correspondences illustrate.<sup>3</sup> However, much of this interest was generated by personal friends of Stevenson, and focused upon Stevenson the man rather than on real attention to his writing. Such a situation formed the pattern of Stevenson criticism, for while regard for his work diminished after his death, interest in his life has persisted. The result is that while Stevenson biography has been a constant topic of study and interest, any really valuable criticism of his writing remains scarce.

There have, in recent years, been attempts to redress this situation, though the focus on biography has at times hampered such criticism, with studies like David Daiches' *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Revaluation* suffering from the attempt to link Stevenson's life and writing and concentrating, somewhat ironically, on the unfinished *Weir of Hermiston* as the best of his fiction.<sup>4</sup> Further attempts at revaluation have also been largely negative, with Andrew Noble, for example, concluding that while Stevenson may be of some importance his work does not merit any really positive

reassessment.<sup>5</sup>

But an alternative branch of criticism does exist, and it is one stemming from an interest in Stevenson's work by postmodern writers. Alasdair Gray has acknowledged a debt to Stevenson in his attempt to conclude the unfinished 'The Story of a Recluse', and perhaps more significantly interest has also come from South American writer Jorge Luis Borges.<sup>6</sup> In his thesis exploring the connections between Borges and Stevenson, Daniel Balderston has suggested that such interest may call for a rereading of Stevenson's fiction, in order that we might more fully understand the attractions of Stevenson to contemporary writers:

Recent criticism of Stevenson, which is overwhelmingly thematic, biographical and psychoanalytical in emphasis, would seem to confirm that Stevenson on his own is not a focus of great critical energy. On the other hand, the interest of such major writers as Borges, Gide, and Nabokov in Stevenson may serve to render credible the possibility that Stevenson may yet become a far more interesting and complex writer than has been realized heretofore.<sup>7</sup>

Little work has yet been done to reassess Stevenson in this context, although Alex Clunas in his article 'R.L. Stevenson: Precursor of the Post - Moderns?', does make the tentative suggestion that Stevenson's fiction and aesthetic critique may be forerunners of what we now regard as 'postmodernism'.<sup>8</sup> Such a claim clearly makes Stevenson of prime interest in this thesis, and it is my intention here to explore reasons why Stevenson may be attractive to the postmoderns, to examine his reactions to the questions which concern them, and to propose that he may indeed emerge as a 'more interesting and complex writer' when regarded in a postmodern framework of thought.

Alex Clunas's claims for Stevenson as 'precursor of the post moderns' are based primarily upon his aesthetic critique and the models of literature developed in his critical writings. Concentrating on the debate between Stevenson and Henry James regarding the nature of representation, Clunas rightly suggests that the position adopted by Stevenson is one particularly akin to a postmodernist understanding of the

nature of language and fiction:

In particular, Stevenson valued the creative and reflexive qualities of language over the descriptive; and in this he is closer to the tradition of scholastic respect for the word rather than the Ramist view of language as a pane of glass through which one sees the world. One consequence of this emphasis on the opacity of the medium of literary art is the precedence which is given to the very *literariness* of the text, to its *difference* from life rather than its power to imitate the world of objects. Indeed, for Stevenson there is no objectivity at all; there is no error under God.<sup>9</sup>

There is no doubt that Clunas's assessment of Stevenson is a sound one, for it is clear that the views of language he identifies here are those which also preoccupy postmodernist thought. However, Stevenson's connection with the postmodern context does not cease at an interest with language alone, but figures the shape of his entire world view, his perception of God, and the techniques, themes and strategies which inform his fiction.<sup>10</sup>

In his essay 'El Dorado' Stevenson proposes a model of life as a journey towards an unobtainable goal; towards an expected centre which we may discover does not exist:

It is true that we shall never reach the goal; it is even more than probable that there is no such place; and if we lived for centuries and were endowed with the powers of a god, we should find ourselves not much nearer what we wanted at the end. O toiling hands of mortals! O unwearied feet, travelling ye know not whither! Soon, soon, it seems to you, you must come forth on some conspicuous hill-top, and but a little farther, against the setting sun, descry the spires of El Dorado. Little do ye know your own blessedness; for to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive, and the true success is in labour.<sup>11</sup>

This now famous quotation is an important one. Not only are journeys of great significance both in Stevenson's personal life and in his fiction, but the concept of life as a journey with no destination, with no centre by which to measure our footsteps, is fundamental to Stevenson's philosophical and moral position, and forms the basis of much of his writing.

It is, too, a concept upon which Stevenson elaborates, and to which he returns in what appear even the most incidental of his writings. In the essay 'Crabbed Age and Youth', he again suggests a model based not on linear progression, but on a notion of travel for travel's sake. An individual's changing opinions, he proposes, are not a series of linear and direct progressions towards a final and mature vision, but, on the contrary, form a group of different, but perhaps equally valid 'grammars' or matrices of experience:

Because I have reached Paris, I am not ashamed of having passed through Newhaven and Dieppe. They were very good places to pass through, and I am none the less at my destination. All my old opinions were only stages on the way to the one I now hold, as itself is only a stage on the way to something else.<sup>12</sup>

Again this apparently incidental observation is significant, for in his typically personal way Stevenson is incisively challenging an Enlightenment concept of history and thought as a process of linear development. Experience, he suggests, may require a more complex model, or interpretive matrix, and in place of the journey, he provides the metaphor of a labyrinth, where travel is towards no fixed centre, no absolute destination:

A man finds he has been wrong at every preceding stage of his career, only to deduce the astonishing conclusion that he is at last entirely right. Mankind, after centuries of failure, are still upon the eve of a thoroughly constitutional millennium. Since we have explored the maze so long without result, it follows, for pure human reason, that we cannot have to explore much longer; close by must be the centre, with a champagne luncheon and a piece of ornamental water. How if there was no centre at all, but just one alley after another, and the whole world a labyrinth without end or issue?<sup>13</sup>

Recognising that there is no 'ultimate referent' beyond language, post-structuralist thought argues that the linear or 'journey' model of experience, unless significantly qualified, is no longer tenable, for it echoes the traditional project of philosophical enquiry to capture 'presence' outside or beyond language. Such 'presence' they propose, is illusionary, and the concept of centre de-centred or unsettled.<sup>14</sup>

'Henceforth it was necessary to begin thinking there was no centre', writes Derrida describing the onset of post-structuralism:

That the center could not be thought of in the form of a present-being, that the center had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse - provided we can agree on this word - that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside the system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely.<sup>15</sup>

Linear models of human experience and of thought based on a journey metaphor are thus discredited. Interestingly echoing a metaphor of Stevenson's, the later Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations*, exploring just this 'moment', rather belatedly announced by Derrida, suggests the image of the labyrinth as a more appropriate episteme:

Language is a labyrinth of paths. You approach from *one* side and know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about.<sup>16</sup>

Unlike the journey, the labyrinth expresses a free play of concepts; a far more flexible model of experience as a matrix of non-hierarchical ideas. The postmodern condition, correspondingly, incorporates the recognition that if we are to proceed, it must be by a recognition of such a model and its implications, which although disruptive, may also prove to be liberating.

Stevenson's fiction may likewise be read as a response to such concepts. 'There is no centre to the maze', he concludes, 'because like the famous sphere, its centre is everywhere.'<sup>17</sup> His writing is, typically, a response to this conclusion, and an exploration of the world we may inhabit once such certainties are gone.

Travelling and journeys figure prominently both in Stevenson's life and in his writing, and even the most basic knowledge of his biography will suggest that travel

was not only a necessity imposed by illness, but one of the true joys of his life.<sup>18</sup> 'I travel for travel's sake', he writes in *Travels with a Donkey*,<sup>19</sup> and Fanny Stevenson gives a sharp insight into her husband's character when she describes his love of maps and journeys:

To the end of his life he found the keenest pleasure in the study of a map, especially one of roads. Like Branwell Brönte, of whom he could never speak without emotion, he would sit poring over maps, making imaginary journeys. Like young Brönte, too, he knew the hours when the railway trains of London and Paris started, and when outgoing passenger ships left English and French ports.<sup>20</sup>

Journeys too, not surprisingly, figure prominently in Stevenson's fiction, and it is perhaps no coincidence that the genesis of *Treasure Island*, as he describes it in 'My First Book' was with the drawing of a map, the shape of which 'took my fancy beyond expression' and with 'harbours that pleased me like sonnets'.<sup>21</sup>

The fate of this map, if we are to believe this anecdote, is perhaps appropriate, for the original was lost at the publishers never to be recovered. This was a fitting end for this first map in Stevenson's fiction, since what marks the journeys in his writing so distinctively is that they end nowhere, or at least indeterminately, and what is surprising about the maps which accompany them is that they seldom lead to any satisfactory destination.

Certainly, for all the emphasis Stevenson places on the map which was the impetus for *Treasure Island*, this is the case in the novel which he eventually wrote.<sup>22</sup> At its most basic level, the plot of *Treasure Island* with its search for buried treasure and its eventual recovery, is that of the quest - figuring a search for presence and essential meaning. In this respect, the map discovered by Jim Hawkins is of vital importance, for it is the impulse behind the quest motif, the cause of the obstacles which prevent its denouement, and ostensibly the source of its eventual fulfilment. However, its apparent centrality to the narrative is somewhat more problematic than this would suggest, for to some extent at least the quest at the heart of *Treasure Island* is defeated.<sup>23</sup> The map, upon which such emphasis is placed fails in its most basic



function of leading Hawkins and his friends to the treasure, and Jim, writing retrospectively, informs us that he can not disclose the bearings of the island, for 'there is treasure not yet lifted'(p.3).

The map, apparently at the heart of *Treasure Island* leads in fact to an empty centre, for while it may include all the colourful and grim details we would expect of an adventure story, it leads Silver and his cronies not to the treasure, but to what Jim describes as a 'great excavation':

And suddenly, not ten yards further, we beheld them stop. A low cry arose. Silver doubled his pace, digging away with the foot of his crutch like one possessed; and next moment he and I had come also to a dead halt.

Before us was a great excavation, not very recent, for the sides had fallen in and grass had sprouted on the bottom. In this were the shaft of a pick broken in two and the boards of several packing-cases strewn around. On one of these boards I saw, branded with a hot iron, the name *Walrus*- the name of Flint's ship.

All was clear to probation. The *cache* had been found and rifled: the seven hundred thousand pounds were gone!(p.214)

The treasure is of course eventually found, but ironically it is not by the map that it is recovered but, significantly, by Ben Gunn and his 'long, lonely wanderings about the island'(p.218). Map and journey have in *Treasure Island* at least, led to no El Dorado, and for Jim it is a quest which he will not venture to make again:

The bar silver and the arms still lie, for all that I know where Flint buried them; and certainly they shall lie there for me. Oxen and wain-ropes would not bring me back again to that accursed island; and the worst dreams that ever I have are when I hear the surf booming about its coasts, or start upright in bed, with the sharp voice of Captain Flint still ringing in my ears: 'Pieces of eight! pieces of eight!'(p.227).

*Treasure Island*, then, suggests that the quest form, with its traditional pattern of journey, challenge and fulfilment, is unsatisfactory, for the rewards it brings prove insufficient. Neither Jim nor Ben Gunn seem to benefit from the recovery of the treasure, for it brings neither resolution or contentment, but only a 'great excavation' or emotional vacuum.<sup>24</sup>

Quests for treasure, then, and the linear journeys which they incorporate, are shown to be inappropriate 'grammars' in Stevenson's fiction, for the rewards they promise do not provide the comfort of a final or safe resting place. Not surprisingly, therefore while journeys may appear to be the motive behind other of Stevenson's novels, they in fact resist the conventional totalising impulse of linear progressions, frequently leading nowhere, and contributing little to any final resolution in the narrative.

Travel in Stevenson's fiction, in fact, begins to emerge not as a linear journey towards an El Dorado, but as a series of wanderings where alternative perspectives and contexts may be explored. This distinction, which is one between the notion of linear progression and labyrinthian exploration, is one which is consolidated in his second novel *Kidnapped*.<sup>25</sup>

Like *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped* ostensibly adopts the form of the quest. Its hero, David Balfour, begins the novel in search of a fortune, a new life and the 'essence' of his identity, embarking on a journey by which to find them:

I will begin the story of my adventures with a certain morning early in the month of June, the year of grace 1751, when I took the key for the last time out of the door of my father's house. The sun began to shine upon the summit of the hills as I went down the road; and by the time I had come as far as the manse, the blackbirds were whistling in the garden lilacs, and the mist that hung around the valley in the time of the dawn was beginning to arise and die away.(p.3)

It is not, however, at the House of Shaws, his destination on this June morning, that David is to find his destiny. His arrival at it, in a chapter ironically entitled 'I Come to my Journey's End', is to mark only the outset of his travels, or what the map which accompanies *Kidnapped* describes, tellingly, as his 'wanderings'.

David's wanderings' in *Kidnapped* are, in fact, almost a kind of diversion; a narrative loop between his departure from Queensferry on a cold June morning until his return to the Hawes Tavern 'far through August'(p.209). In practical terms this journey achieves nothing, for David's affairs with his uncle are little resolved and probably only complicated by what Rankeillor is to describe as his 'odyssey'(p.228). While David may at the end of the novel in one sense 'come into his kingdom', it is by

no virtue of these wanderings, and the conclusion of *Kidnapped* finds him in other ways still 'drifting', searching for a resolution of his problems with Alan, and wandering on into the pages of its sequel *Catriona*.

*Kidnapped* suggests, then, that the true purpose of travel in Stevenson's fiction is not in the final destination, for as David Daiches points out, 'the journey of David and Alan is prolonged beyond the point required for the proper manipulation of the hero's fortunes'.<sup>26</sup> No reader can be in doubt, however, that this disproportionate narrative digression is in fact the true substance of the novel, for the inheritance plot is a stock one and largely unelaborated and uninteresting. Far more engaging is the relationship of David and Alan and the wanderings which it incorporates. Interest is thus focused not on linear progression towards a fixed point of rest or arrival, but on the wanderings, or series of contexts themselves. Behind such a structure lies a challenging world view and philosophy which is to emerge in the thematic concerns of Stevenson's work and the correlative models of experience suggested by his fiction.

While the wanderings which concern so much of Stevenson's fiction may be regarded as superfluous to the primary quest motif of the narrative, it is clear that they function on a secondary level as sites of emotional and moral development. Like Stevenson's own 'imaginary journeys', they are travels of the mind, and of the spirit. The nature of this moral development, and the models of experience it proposes, have been the subject of much Stevenson criticism.<sup>27</sup> Such thematic development can, however, also be read in terms of travelling hopefully; in terms of a distinction between journeys and wanderings, quest and labyrinth which shapes Stevenson's fiction at the most basic of structural levels.

The post-Enlightenment model of human experience as a journey towards empirical truth and the traditional philosophical project of the search for the 'ultimate referent' beyond language have both been sustained by a world model construed in terms of binary and antithetical systems. Language, however, does not simply proceed by such opposition alone, but also by the 'slippage' and '*différance*' between

terms. The linear model, absolutist in its concept of a destination determined by a series of knowable and impartial facts, and totalising in its refusal to consider the value of opposing or alternative perspectives, is consequently untenable once the notion of centre or of ultimate referent has been abandoned. In the light of post-structuralist thought, then, it has been replaced by more flexible and pluralistic models which acknowledge the ambivalent and relativistic nature of human existence and the desire of abstract philosophy to negate such diversity in its impulse towards totalisation.<sup>28</sup>

Stevenson's fiction, likewise, explores the dangers and inadequacies of abstract and absolutist binary models and suggests that social relationships may be better expressed in terms of more diverse and ambiguous grammars. The moral explorations which take place in Stevenson's fiction are ones which reflect his preference for wanderings above journeys, by proposing a social and contextualized form of morality - one which recognises, to use a figure from Wittgenstein again, that game-rules are evolved in context - in place of the absolutism of the Calvinist creed which had shaped both his childhood and Scottish experience. Models of human behaviour thus emerge in his fiction as ambiguous and multiplistic, while absolute and binary systems begin to collapse inwards in the face of the 'lived experience' undergone in his fictions.

This is a pattern which emerges as early as *Treasure Island*. The novel is clearly as much a journey of self-discovery for Jim Hawkins as it is a search for treasure. Moreover, the kind of development which takes place in this early novel and the types of lesson which Hawkins learns provide a pattern for the debates which take place in Stevenson's later fiction.

Glenda Norquay, recognising a conflict between two types of moral perception in the novel, suggests the following reading of *Treasure Island*:

We can see the various shifts of stance involved in Jim's attempts to reconcile his personal code of morality with the events around him. Through his dual perspective we gain a sense of the immense difficulties involved in moral assessment, in the attempt to reconcile the extreme and unfamiliar into a code established by conventions.<sup>29</sup>

Norquay's thesis of *Treasure Island*, and indeed of Stevenson's fiction generally, is

that it repeatedly takes a relativistic moral code and sets it in opposition with an absolutist one, finding the former, in the face of lived experience, inadequate. But whilst it is certainly true that this is the kind of debate at work in Stevenson's fiction, it is arguably the case that rather than hankering after an absolutist morality, as so many critics suggest, he shares with Wittgenstein the recognition that absolutist systems are implausible and a correlative desire to find a way to proceed within a more pluralistic and ambivalent position.<sup>30</sup>

It is, indeed, Jim's initial moral code which may more readily be described as extreme, for, with a child-like naivety, he begins the novel with a simple and binary concept of the ways in which morality and human nature may be defined.<sup>31</sup> For Jim, the world exists in black and white. The 'good' like Dr Livesy, may be easily discerned by their appearance, for 'the neat, bright doctor, with his powder as white as snow, and his bright black eyes and pleasant manners' expresses outwardly his inward moral character(p.8). Similarly, the 'bad', such as Blind Pew, can be detected by the ugliness of their outward selves:

He was plainly blind, for he tapped before him with a stick, and wore a great green shade over his eyes and nose; and he was hunched, as if with age or weakness, and wore a huge old tattered sea-cloak with a hood, that made him appear positively deformed. I never saw in my life a more dreadful figure.(p.21)

This simple and binary model of human character is, however, disrupted by Long John Silver for, faced with the congenial outward appearance of the man, Hawkins' capacity for moral assessment is inadequate. While the reader, at least as an adult, may suspect that 'the sea-faring man with one leg' whom Jim encounters at *The Spy-Glass* may be the man Billy Bones has so feared, Jim is readily deceived by his apparent easy manners and pleasant countenance:

Now, to tell you the truth, from the very first mention of Long John in Squire Trelawney's letter, I had taken a fear in my mind that he might prove to be the very one-legged sailor whom I had watched for so long at the old *Benbow*. But one look at the man before me was enough. I had seen the captain, and Black Dog, and the blind man Pew, and I thought I knew what a buccaneer was like - a very different creature, according to me, from this clean and pleasant-tempered

The real journey of *Treasure Island* for Jim Hawkins is, then, not one towards a confirmation of a fixed and absolute model of morality, but a 'wandering' towards a realisation that such a naive system is inadequate. Character, Jim learns, cannot be so easily discerned, but is complex, infinitely deceptive, and irreducibly ambiguous, resting upon the line of slippage between terms such as 'good and 'evil'.

A reading of *Treasure Island* in these terms is one supported by a much neglected piece, 'The Persons of the Tale', published after Stevenson's death in a group called *Fables*.<sup>32</sup> While these 'fables' have been largely ignored, and are in themselves apparently trivial, they show Stevenson exploring at a very simple, and at times almost allegorical level, some of the moral questions which inform his writing. Here, in 'The Persons of the Tale', Stevenson extracts both Silver and Captain Smollett from the context of *Treasure Island*, to have them discuss their relative positions inside the moral matrix of the text. Accused by Smollett of being a 'damned rogue', Silver protests that he is, like the captain, only a 'chara'ter in a sea story', and that surely, outside in the 'real' world such absolute standards do not exist(p.297). Smollett, while reminding Silver that there is both an Author, and if he is to remember his catechism, a 'future state', is also forced to admit that outside the world of the text he is not so unquestionably 'good' as this model paints him(p.297). Silver asks him if he considers himself a "'virtuous char'ter clean through?'"

'God forbid!' said Captain Smollett solemnly. 'I am a man that tries to do his duty, and makes a mess of it as often as not. I'm not a very popular man at home, Silver, I'm afraid!' and the Captain sighed.(p.298)

Stevenson here seems to be suggesting, that while Smollett's 'Author', like the Calvinist God, may operate at an ontological level where absolute standards of good and evil apply, within the story, as in the 'ontic', or temporal world of lived experience, such binary frameworks become inadequate. On the contrary, within this world, both Smollett and Silver agree, there must be a 'slippage' of such categories,



an interaction of both 'virtuous characters' and 'villains' if 'story' is to proceed. Experience, consequently, demands a more relative and sympathetic understanding of human character, and any more total model may, as Smollett's 'God forbid' suggests, be positively dangerous.<sup>33</sup>

Such a reading of *Treasure Island* is at odds with psychoanalytical approaches to Stevenson's work which see in it a hankering after the moral certainties which shaped his childhood under the influence of both his parents and Alison Cunningham.<sup>34</sup> Such a reading is also at odds with Glenda Norquay's thesis, which, while being one of the finest pieces of criticism yet to appear on Stevenson, retains a desire to find in his work a totalising and absolutist principle.<sup>35</sup> Norquay argues that a strand of Scottish fiction, influenced by the absolutist nature of Calvinism, explores a conflict between a relativistic and an absolute morality, and finds the former lacking. The relativistic position she associates with both the English novel and the method of realism, proposing that it is an inadequate medium for the Scottish position which on the contrary demands an acknowledgement of extremes:

Unable to accommodate a view of existence which incorporates an awareness of moral absolutes, the realist novel is therefore an unsuitable vehicle for such writers in the reflection and exploration of their ontological position.<sup>36</sup>

The result in Stevenson's work, she suggests, is both a desire to avoid realism as a method, and a thematic exploration of the dangers of avoiding extreme moral categories within a more relativistic system:

Therefore, although it is reasonable to assume that Stevenson was opposed to the practices of Calvinist religion as he had experienced them in his childhood, and in the teachings of the nineteenth-century Scottish church and the social codes of Edinburgh, it is also clear that his metaphysical concerns were deeply affected by the most basic Calvinist precepts which lingered on in the Scottish cast of mind, changing little despite social dilution. And although he may have rejected it as a religion, Calvinism still remained an important structuring element in his world view, expressed as a desire for moral absolutes; a desire which had a striking effect upon the kind of fiction he wrote.<sup>37</sup>

While I would agree with Norquay that Calvinism and the absolute moral code it proposes deeply affected Stevenson, I would dispute her analysis of the effect it had on his writing. While it may, like the 'Author' in 'The Persons of the Tale', offer the false security of a totalising system, it is a model which Stevenson chose to reject along with his formal rejection of Calvinism and the hypocritical morality which it provoked in nineteenth century Scotland. Rather than retaining a desire for moral and binary absolutes, he rather recognised the impossibility of adhering to them in the lived world, the hypocrisies provoked by the attempt to do so, and the dangers therein. The thematic effect on his writing, consequently, is that while he may indeed bring a relativistic and an absolutist morality into play with each other, it is to show the dangers of the latter and the impossibility of proceeding in the lived world without the benefit of a more pluralistic, discursive as opposed to totalising, model.

It is this critique of absolutes in his work which also accounts for Stevenson's rejection of the realist mode. Norquay argues that realism is a form associated with a relativistic moral framework, unsuitable for Scottish writers in an exploration of extreme ontological positions. This is debatable, for straightforward realism, as the postmodern rejection of it suggests, is a form of epistemological certainty.<sup>38</sup> While the nineteenth century English novel may indeed show a relativistic and social morality, it does so with the belief that standards of 'good' and 'evil', themselves relativised in the more gentle religious system, may somehow be securely defined in the realm of human experience, if only through conscience.<sup>39</sup> Temporal and spiritual worlds are believed to operate within the same pattern, thus suggesting that the world we inhabit is itself an absolute one; akin to a larger framework, and hence, authoritative. The absolute morality of the Calvinist code, on the other hand, creates a far clearer *disjunction* between the ontological and the ontic, highlighting a discrepancy between the religious framework and lived experience, and suggesting that the realm of human existence is outside such binary distinctions. As a result, to live within it demands a more ambiguous and flexible grammar or episteme.

This disjunction between the certainties and absolutes of the ontological dimension

and the more slippery and evasive nature of lived experience is central to Stevenson's writing. But it is not a disjunction which throws him into despair. Rather, like Wittgenstein, he meets the situation gladly, recognising the freedom from totalising systems which it offers. To exist within this discursive framework is, for Stevenson, to 'travel hopefully', to wander freely in a narratological landscape where moral absolutes cannot apply.<sup>40</sup> This celebration very clearly informs his writing, its release from totalising and binary models fundamentally shaping his thematic and structural strategies.

These issues are certainly raised by *Treasure Island*, but they are explored at a more sophisticated level in Stevenson's second novel, *Kidnapped*. As already pointed out, David Balfour's excursion into the Highlands is superfluous in terms of the basic structure of the novel. However, as in *Treasure Island*, the main significance of these 'wanderings' is in the moral and emotional growth of the protagonist. David's concept of a world of absolute good and evil is again one which is challenged through the fiction, for, faced with its representatives - Alan Breck for instance - he is forced to recognise that they cannot be so simplistically defined. On the contrary, Alan breaks free of such neat categorisation, showing that experience is both evasive and slippery. Yet David, like Jim Hawkins, begins the novel with a simplistic binary model intact, and with a sharp set of distinctions between good and evil, right and wrong. While his uncle is thus very quickly positioned on the side of evil, Balfour with a naivety which he later recognises, assumes for himself an oppositionally defined self-righteousness:

There was no doubt about my uncle's enmity; there was no doubt I carried my life in my hand, and he would leave no stone unturned that he might encompass my destruction. But I was young and spirited, and, like most lads that have been country-bred, I had a great opinion of my shrewdness. I had come to his door no better than a beggar and little more than a child; he had met me with treachery and violence; it would be a fine consummation to take the upper hand, and drive him like a herd of sheep.(p.32)

Such a simplistic model of human affairs arises, however, out of innocence and youth, and offers little support for dealing with actual experience. Writing retrospectively, a more mature Alan recognises that positioning himself in this manner left him little prepared for the world which, as an adult, he must inhabit:

I sat there nursing my knee and smiling at the fire; and I saw myself in fancy smell out his secrets one after another, and grow to be that man's king and ruler. The warlock of Essendean, they say, had made a mirror in which men could read the future; it must have been of other stuff than burning coal; for in all the shapes and pictures that I sat and gazed at, there was never a ship, never a seaman with a hairy cap, never a big bludgeon for my silly head, or the least sign of all those tribulations that were ripe to fall on me.(p.32)

In the face of lived experience, therefore, this binary model quickly collapses and once aboard the *Covenant*, the simplistic and innocent system is one swiftly challenged. While at first David attempts to fit the men on board the ship into this absolute framework, he soon realises that such moral categories are inappropriate:

Yet I had not been many days shut up with them before I began to be ashamed of my first judgment, when I had drawn away from them at the Ferry pier, as though they had been unclean beasts. No class of man is altogether bad; but each has its own faults and virtues; and these shipmates of mine were no exception to the rule. Rough they were, sure enough; and bad, I suppose, but they had many virtues. They were kind when it occurred to them; simple even beyond the simplicity of a country lad like me, and had some glimmerings of honesty.(p.49)

However, if David's moral categories are questioned aboard the *Covenant*, they completely disintegrate as a result of his relationship with Alan.

In Alan Breck David finds a fundamental and intractable challenge to any simple opposition between good and evil, right and wrong. He also meets, and examines, a challenge familiar in Scottish writing between Jacobite and Loyalist principles. David's initial reaction to Alan is excitement. Recognising in his Jacobitism an opposition to what he believes to be his own position, he construes him in terms of the 'other', thus setting himself in a binary relationship to him. While he may tell Alan that his political position is 'Betwixt and between', he admits that this is only so as 'not to annoy him', and sees himself as 'as good a Whig as Mr Campbell could make

me'(p.64.)

David's position, then, at the outset of the novel, although founded on an entirely abstract philosophy based on no actual engagement with political affairs, is one which construes Whig and Jacobite beliefs as opposing and excluding principles. Upon this system, likewise, he places corresponding value systems of right and wrong, for the Whig government deserves, in this context, loyalty and obedience, while any act against it is seen as an act of violence. His relationship with Alan, however, and the consequences of the Appin murder, are to challenge this polarised framework, and suggest that a more sophisticated discursive model is required.

It is, clearly, David's engagement with experience and his affection for Alan which begins to break down the simple moral categories and the clear oppositions with which he has begun his journey. His experiences on board the *Covenant*, and his escape by virtue of Alan's aid are what lead him to suspect that the matter of fellowship, and the question of where loyalty and duty should lie, may be more 'fluid' than he has believed:

Here I was not only troubled by a cloud of stinging midges, but far more by the doubts of my mind. What I ought to do, why I was going to join myself with an outlaw and a would-be murderer like Alan, whether I should not be acting more like a man of sense to tramp back to the south country direct, by my own guidance and by my own charges, and what Mr Campbell or even Mr Henderland would think of me if they should ever learn my folly and presumption: these were the doubts that now began to come in on me stronger than ever.(p.129)

But David does not, 'tramp back to the south country direct' nor to the Calvinist teachers who have shaped his upbringing. Instead he exchanges this journey for a series of wanderings in the Highlands. To do so is to invite further challenge to his moral code, all the more so in the light of the Appin murder. Both physically and mentally, it is to lead him into a Highland wilderness, where his moral categories disintegrate to reveal a spiritual grey area - a slippage - between 'right' and 'wrong'.

Yet David's journey is again not a linear one, for initially his witnessing of the murder of the Red Fox throws him back upon earlier and more naive moral

distinctions. Fearing Alan's guilt, his actual experience of his friend is quickly forgotten, and he construes him once more only in terms of evil:

By my way of it, my only friend in that wild country was blood-guilty in the first degree; I held him in horror, I could not look upon his face, I would have rather lain alone in the rain on my cold isle, than in that warm wood beside a murderer.(p.135)

Again, however, he is to discover that such a reaction may be disproportionate. Not only does it transpire that Alan is not guilty, he proposes a framework which places the murder in far more ambiguous terms. "And here is a great deal of work about a Campbell," he tells David, "They are not so scarce, that I ken!", suggesting that the issues involved may not be as clear cut as his friend believes(p.137).

This incident is in fact only the first in a process by which David learns from his relationship with Alan that boundaries between good and evil, right and wrong, may be flexible and shifting entities. Rather than being absolute, they are, he is to discover, bound by individual convictions and social contexts, by discourses or 'grammars' where the 'game-rules' may alter according to the given situation. Alan, by holding an opposing set of principles, yet ones in which he equally believes, offers this dual perspective, thus deconstructing any straightforward model of social contracts:

When it came to this, I gave Alan up. But he looked so innocent all the time, and was in such clear good faith in what he said, and so ready to sacrifice himself for what he deemed his duty, that my mouth was closed. Mr Henderland's words came back to me: that we ourselves might take a lesson by these wild Highlanders. Well, here I had taken mine. Alan's morals were all tail-first; but he was ready to give his life for them, such as they were.(p.138)

This lesson demands that David reconsiders his model of both morality and 'truth'. 'Truth', he learns, may not be an essential absolute resting on simple binary categories but may, rather, be a flexible entity and a matter of personal choice and responsibility. Such lessons are to lead him into the pages of *Catriona*, but by the end of *Kidnapped*, David has gone much of the way to learn that his early moral categorisations and concepts of truth are, in the face of lived experience, inappropriate.<sup>41</sup> Thus once more



outraged by Alan's behaviour in 'Cluny's Cage', David again temporarily resorts to his old categories and methods of behaviour. Quickly, however, he recognises that they are ridiculous:

But besides that I was of an unforgiving disposition from my birth, slow to take offence, slower to forget it, and now incensed both against my companion and myself. For the best part of two days he was unweariedly kind; silent, indeed, but always ready to help, and always hoping (as I could very well see) that my displeasure would blow by. For the same length of time I stayed in myself, nursing my anger, roughly refusing his services, and passing him over with my eyes as if he had been a bush or a stone.(p.194)

Such behaviour is clearly destructive. Determined to set himself and Alan within a grammar of binary opposition, David forces Alan to do likewise, meeting his petulance with the accusation 'Whig'. The effects are nearly to cost them their friendship. Such categories, however, in the face of their shared experiences, are clearly nonsense. David, realising the price such a framework demands, admits that his behaviour is that of 'a boy of ten', and inappropriate for the complexities of adult experience.

It is, then, a more mature David who returns to Queensferry at the end of the novel. With both his moral model and his definitions of human character modified, this David realises that it is at times necessary to recognise moral categories as ambiguous and to sacrifice abstract and absolute principles for the sake of the social good - to alter the game-rules as the situation demands. He co-operates with Rankeillor, consequently, in a way surely unavailable to the priggish young man of 'Cluny's Cage', disguising details of Alan's identity in order that his uncle might be defeated:

By this I saw he must have heard the name all too clearly, and had already guessed I might be coming to the murder. If he chose to play this part of ignorance, it was no matter of mine; so I smiled, said it was no very Highland-sounding name, and consented. Through all the rest of my story Alan was Mr Thomson; which amused me the more, as it was a piece of policy after his own heart.(p.228)

Such behaviour, we can assume, would have been unavailable to David at the outset,

though by the end of his wanderings he realises that there may be virtue in Alan's more relative and evasive episteme for truth and morality. In the light of this, however, the destination reached at the end of the novel - the resolution of a binary framework in the defeat of 'good' over 'evil' and the capitulation of his uncle- is necessarily unsatisfactory, for the world, David has discovered, is not so simply nor so finally divided or remedied. Consequently, he may have come to the end of his journey, but his wanderings are to continue into the pages of *Catriona*.

If David learns in *Kidnapped* that journeys do not have absolute destinations, and that moral dilemmas cannot always be easily resolved, the concept of 'travelling hopefully' is only one he learns to celebrate in its sequel. Like *Kidnapped*, *Catriona* is a novel full of travelling, for David's loyalty to Alan, and his quest for truth and justice are to take him on many journeys both in Scotland and abroad. However, if David's quest for justice may begin as a journey, it too develops into a 'wandering', providing a site of emotional growth and development.

David begins *Catriona* with a naive sense of justice, and a simplistic belief that truth is a straightforward matter which will necessarily prevail. Alan, however, recognises that such a naive faith in the forces of justice is innocent in a Scotland wracked by political controversy and manipulation, and suggests that both 'truth' and 'justice' may themselves be ambiguous and evasive entities, consisting not of essential realities but of the political rhetorics through which experience is mediated:

'And what would the clan think if there was a Campbell shot, and naebody hanged, and their own chief the Justice-General? But I have often observed', says Alan, 'that you Low-country bodies have no clear idea of what's right and wrong.'<sup>42</sup>

Within conventional categories, it is, of course, Alan's notion of justice which seems bizarre, but in the course of *Catriona*, David learns that it is highly perceptive. Convinced though he is of both his own, and Alan's, innocence, his attempts to stand trial and indeed the trial itself, are marked by political manipulation and injustice.

Recognising this, David begins to learn that no truth is unbiased, and that even his own motives have behind them a form of manipulation and partiality:

Next it came upon me that I was acting for the sake of justice: and I thought that a fine word, And reasoned it out that (since we dwelt in politics, at some discomfort to each one of us) the main thing of all must still be justice, and the death of any innocent man a wound upon the whole community. Next, again, it was the Accuser of the Brethren that gave me a turn of his argument; bade me think shame for pretending myself concerned in these high matters, and told me I was but a prating vain child, who had spoken big words to Rankeillor and to Stewart, and held myself bound upon my vanity to make good that boastfulness. Nay, and he hit me with the other end of the stick; for he accused me of a kind of artful cowardice, going about at the expense of a little risk to purchase greater safety.(p.23/24)

'There are no facts, only interpretations', writes Nietzsche, and here David gradually comes to recognise that even one's own self may not be constructed unambiguously.<sup>43</sup> On the contrary, truth is not impartial, but a consequence of the grammar by which we translate it. Yet David learns this lesson the hard way. It takes his imprisonment on the Bass Rock, and the sham of his trial - which transpires much as Alan had predicted - to convince him that justice cannot be a pure principle. It is he discovers, necessarily a slippery and evasive entity and thus one politically and socially loaded, even when in the hands of the mighty Prestongrange.

In the course of *Catriona*, then, Stevenson proposes that the journey towards legal or political justice cannot be a simple and straightforward one for they themselves are complex and ambiguous concepts. Rather than being absolutes, they are, on the contrary, a matter of social contexts, again, of discourse, and measures which may vary according to the individual's perception of 'reality' as the 'game-rules' shift and change. To recognise as much may be a mark of maturity, and certainly David's response to it is to relinquish his venture into the abstract world of politics and to attempt to find a destination in a more private realm:

So there was the final upshot of my politics! Innocent men have perished before James, and are likely to keep on perishing, (in spite of all our wisdom) till the end of time. And till the end of time young folk ( who are not yet used to the duplicity of life and men) will struggle as I did, and make heroic resolves, and take long risks; and the course of events will push them upon the one side and go on like a

marching army....

.....But I had had my view of that detestable business they call politics - I had seen it from behind, when it is all bones and blackness; and I was cured for life of any temptations to take part in it again. A plain, quiet, private path was that which I was ambitious to walk in, when I might keep my head out of the way of dangers and my conscience out of the road of temptation. For, upon a retrospect, it appeared I had not done so grandly, after all; but with the greatest possible amount of big speech and preparation, had accomplished nothing.(p.203/204)

This retreat into the private realm is thus symptomatic of a recognition by David that the world does not operate by the grand metaphysical absolutes of religion or politics, but, on the contrary, by the more ambiguous and evasive 'grammar' of lived experience. Moral responsibility is, consequently, moved away from a set of abstract binary systems towards the individual, and morality recognised as a social, and discursive rather than an absolute, essential code.

Individual moral responsibility, however, and the private realm David chooses to inhabit, are themselves complex, and the final lesson that he is to learn is that these too must incorporate a recognition of the flexible nature of human relations. It is a far different David from the one that so quickly judges his uncle who suggests to Mr Stewart that it is 'hard to ken folk rightly'(p.22). This mature vision recognises that people do not fit neatly into pre-given moral categories, but constantly erupt out of them. As a result they must be judged only by one's own, and continually shifting, experience. It is such a mature vision too which in the end allows David's marriage with Catriona, for by the absolute standards which he holds at the outset it is at best ambiguous and at worst foolish. These are, however, standards which David no longer finds adequate, and he quite happily marries the daughter of a rebel whom he can never bring himself to admire, and at that, under the most suspicious of circumstances. To do so is a mark of how far he has developed, and a recognition that the journey upon which he has been travelling is not one towards any absolute destination but towards a pluralistic position within the ever shifting perspectives of the maze. The rewards of such wanderings are apparent, for it is clear, by virtue of the retrospective narration, that his marriage to Catriona is a long and happy one.

The moral and emotional 'wanderings' which take place in *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped* and *Catriona* are significant, for they show Stevenson challenging abstract and binary metaphysical concepts, and replacing them with more flexible grammars of 'reality' based on engagement with life. This too, is the project of deconstruction as it is defined by Charles Altieri, for it brings the abstracts of traditional philosophical thought up against the 'rough ground' of actual experience.<sup>44</sup> The binary models and absolute of the philosophical enterprise have been sustained precisely because they are divorced from the vicissitudes of real experience. 'Reality' is, however, always more problematic, demanding flexible and ambiguous frameworks. Likewise, in his early fiction Stevenson explores how the rigid codes of his youthful and naive protagonists rapidly disintegrate in the face of lived experience. As a result, these early fictions provide a 'map' of the philosophical debates which Stevenson is to pursue with greater complexity in his later novels, and which he embodied in his own life as he moved increasingly away from the hypocrisies of Victorian Scotland. These are also concerns which he explores in his critical writings.

Stevenson's critical writings have, in many respects, been paid more serious attention than his fictional work. To some extent this is perhaps not surprising, for works like *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* belie their own complexity, having a surface veneer of simplicity which discourages close critical consideration.<sup>45</sup> His critical writings, on the other hand, contain a carefully debated conception of both literature and morality which is recognisably in advance of its nineteenth century context. In spite of this they are certainly complimentary to, rather than at odds with, his fiction, supporting a reading of his early works in terms of a challenge to totalising and binary models of thought, and offering insight into his later writing.

The labyrinthian model of human experience which Stevenson proposes in 'El Dorado', and 'Crabbed Age and Youth' is one which he develops elsewhere. To the concept of 'travelling hopefully' he brings an increasingly sophisticated debate on

morality, on the nature of truth, and on the representation of it in writing. Clearly then, it is worth examining this discussion before moving on to a consideration of Stevenson's later fiction.

At the centre of this discussion is the essay 'The Morality of the Profession of Letters', published in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1881.<sup>46</sup> Here, in an essay which clearly anticipates some of the central tenets of postmodernist thought, Stevenson proposes that the art of writing, since unique among the arts in consisting of language, inevitably forms opinions, and carries, consequently, a special responsibility. Language, he recognises, is fundamentally reflexive, and thus cannot be neutral, inevitably carrying with it the moods and sentiments of its author. 'A fact,' he suggests, 'may be chronicled with rage, tears, laughter, indifference, or admiration', so that all that language can convey is not 'truth', or essence, but a series of attitudes:

In all works of art, widely speaking, it is first of all the author's attitude that is narrated, though in the attitude there be implied a whole experience and a theory of life.(p.64)

Like Nietzsche, and his conceptual heir Derrida, then, Stevenson is proposing that in writing there can be no fact without interpretation; no access to a greater truth or presence behind or within language. 'Truth', he concludes, cannot exist as a single entity outside of these writings, but must consist only of an amalgam or 'web' of these texts.

From this position, Stevenson concludes that the 'morality of the profession of letters' must involve a resistance to the impulses within language to evade such reflexivity, must attempt always to incorporate its own slippage, or, as Stevenson defines it be 'intellectual'. The writer 'should see good in all things', he concludes, not in one side of the question alone, for the only immoral literature is that which denies the partiality of the attitudes behind it and claims to be absolutely representative, absolutely true(p.64):



Man is imperfect; yet, in his literature, he must express himself and his own views and preferences; for to do anything else is to do a far more perilous thing than to risk being immoral; it is sure to be untrue.(66)

For Stevenson, then, the act of writing must incorporate within itself a recognition of, and a challenge to, its own totalising potential; a project which itself could be described as a form of deconstruction.

This complex understanding of the relationship between truth and writing is one which he elaborates in the essay 'Books which Have Influenced Me'.<sup>47</sup> Written in 1887, this essay develops the early proposals on the nature of truth, and suggests that every 'truth' also contains a lie, by virtue of that which it excludes. Writing on the nature of a binary model of language, Derrida suggests that such a framework must continually silence all aspects of language and experience 'in excess' of its own system. 'Knowledge', however, cannot be contained in this manner, and any model of language or experience must acknowledge the 'pollutant' of *différance* within itself. Similarly Stevenson proposes that 'real knowledge' cannot achieve presence but only consists of the constant ability to consider alternative positions and apparently contradictory constructions of the truth:

A human truth, which is always very much a lie, hides as much of life as it displays. It is men who hold another truth, or, as it seems to us, perhaps, a dangerous lie, who can extend our restricted field of knowledge, and rouse our drowsy consciences.(75)

Such a position, Derrida concludes, affirms that it is impossible for language to achieve the 'centre', as indeed does Stevenson, likewise, acknowledging as he does in the earlier 'Crabbed Age and Youth', that there can be no such thing as a whole or totalising truth, but that, 'there is nothing so evident in life as that there are two sides to a question'.<sup>48</sup>

This model of truth or knowledge, not unlike that which David Balfour discovers in *Kidnapped* and *Catriona*, inevitably shapes Stevenson's concepts of both morality and human experience. Within it, morality is figured not as an absolute, but as a matter of social, discursive responsibility worked out in context between 'players'. While many

critics may find in his work a hankering after moral certainty, this seems contradictory to the ideas proposed in these essays, which suggest far more assertively that any totalising view of human experience or human character will be inadequate, a point which he makes explicit in 'Books which have Influenced Me'. Praising *Goethe's Life* by George Henry Lewes, Stevenson points out that human character is not easily defined but infinitely complex and ambiguous:

Biography, usually so false to its offices, does here for once perform for us some of the work of fiction, reminding us, that is, of the truly mingled tissue of man's nature, and how huge faults and shining virtues cohabit and persevere in the same character.(p.72)

The 'truly mingled tissue of man's nature' is a cornerstone of Stevenson's moral vision, and the lesson learnt by both David Balfour and Jim Hawkins. Both learn, as Stevenson suggests in these essays, that truth is an ambiguous and multiplistic entity, and that human character is likewise multifarious. To discover this may be liberating, may be to travel hopefully. The alternative however, immoral in its desire to totalise and to silence the 'lies' which it contains, may be dangerous. The perils of such an absolutist position are ones which Stevenson explores in his later fiction, and may be examined through a reading of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and *The Master of Ballantrae*.<sup>49</sup>

Before discussing these novels it is worth considering one of Stevenson's earlier short stories, which, like his later fiction, explores the dangers of an absolutist grammar with which to construct human experience. Stevenson's short stories provide some of the most interesting of his fiction, for the 'tale' formula which he employs lends itself well to the shorter form. Also, as with many other writers, we find in his short stories a condensed form of the thematic concerns which surface in the longer fiction.<sup>50</sup> While, unfortunately, lack of space prohibits discussing the stories at any great length, it is well worth dealing with the way in which the thematic and moral issues central to his fiction emerge in one of the finest of them, 'The Merry

First published in 1882, and thus contemporary with *Treasure Island*, 'The Merry Men', is typical of many of Stevenson's short stories in its use of Scottish material, and in its hinting at a supernatural dimension. In terms of theme, if not structure, it explores moral and spiritual questions with the sophistication that is to mark Stevenson's more mature fiction. In the story, he places an absolutist and binary moral system- a 'damnatory creed' - in opposition to a relative and more ambivalent code, and explores the dangers implicit in the attempt to live within the first of these(p.46).

Significantly, the action takes place in a remote and isolated part of Scotland, named, tellingly, Aros Jay, or The House of God. Here, an older and more extreme form of Calvinism persists, epitomised by Gordon Darnaway. His religion is both absolutist and totalising, in the rigidity of its distinctions between salvation and damnation. The effects of this binary system form the basis of the story, for within it there is little hope of redemption. God emerges like the merry men, 'no better than a trap', where all men, and the aptly named *Espirato Santo*, inevitably perish(p.7). The attempt to live within its absolutist code eventually drives Darnaway insane, for once he has broken its rigid game-rules, it is a strategy which offers no hope of redemption. Unable to construe himself as absolutely good Darnaway, perceiving himself only within this binary framework, positions himself as absolutely, and actively, evil, waiting with passion for the devil to receive him. Like the sinner in Hogg's *Confessions*, Darnaway can see no model of himself which is not an absolute one, and with a self hatred which is the reverse side of the coin from Robert Wringhim, in his own way equally evokes the 'devil'.<sup>52</sup>

An alternative and more flexible position is provided in the novel however by the narrator Charles Darnaway. An educated man, and notably an incomer to the island, Charles offers a more sympathetic and less absolute vision. While his uncle celebrates the dancing of the Merry Men as the sign of God's inevitable punishment, Charles celebrates the coming of lighthouses to the region:

The truth is, that in a south-western wind that part of our archipelago is no better than a trap. If a ship got through the reefs, and weathered the Merry Men, it would be to come ashore on the south coast of Aros, in Sandag Bay, where so many dismal things befell our family, as I propose to tell. The thought of all these dangers, in the place I knew so long, makes me particularly welcome the works now going forward to set lights upon the headlands and buoys along the channels of our iron-bound, inhospitable islands.(p.7)

Charles's welcoming of these 'beacons in the darkness' - a symbol of God's grace - are, however, also representative of the moral system which, unlike his uncle's, incorporates the concept of forgiveness, and the hope of salvation.<sup>53</sup> Within this creed, there is room for the more compassionate face of religion, and a more ambiguous relationship between salvation and damnation. While his uncle's creed is 'damnatory', Charles accepts that though sin may be unavoidable, man may still be redeemed:

'You were my father's brother', I continued; 'You have taught me to count your house as if it were my father's house; and we are both sinful men walking before the Lord among the sins and dangers of this life. It is by our evil that God leads us into good; we sin, I dare not say by His temptation, but I must say with his consent; and to any but the brutish man his sins are the beginning of wisdom. God has warned you by this crime; He warns you still by the bloody grave between our feet; and if there shall follow no repentance, no improvement, no return to Him, what can we look for but the following of some memorable judgment?'(p.52)

As might be expected, Charles Darnaway's belief in a more ambiguous and less totalising system are ones reinforced by the story. His uncle refuses to abandon his absolute system, and believing himself cut off from God by his actions, offers himself up to damnation. The consequence is, indeed, a 'memorable judgment', for daily expecting the devil, he readily recognises him in the unfortunate survivor of a new wreck. The result is his madness, his death, and more poignantly, the death of an innocent survivor.

'The Merry Men', therefore, emerges as a kind of justification for 'the mingled tissue of man's nature' as opposed to an absolute model of the human condition. Darnaway's code is riddled with dangers for it both denies human frailty and imposes the absolute nature of the ontological dimension onto that of lived experience. To do

so deprives the individual of both choice and freedom, for denying that he could, by his own free will, return to God and learn from his error, Darnaway enters into a preordained system where his own fate is 'written otherwise', and apparently predestined and inevitable. Charles's redemptive, discursive rather than essentially 'written' creed on the other hand, offers choice to the individual but carries with it the burden of human responsibility. With the absolute certainties of the ontological dimension recognised as no longer appropriate for lived experience, Charles must, as Wittgenstein proposes, acknowledge that the 'game-rules' are a social contract, worked out between individuals, and carrying interpretive, 'grammatical' responsibility. Such a conclusion is a revealing one for as Jenni Calder suggests, Stevenson is concerned with the way in which morality is not a pre-given absolute, but the responsibility of the individual:

He was acutely aware of what could happen when moral structures collapsed, he wrote about this often, but he made it quite clear that the individual had to work out his own code of behaviour, his own morality. A blind adherence to some one else's set of rules was worthless, even dangerous. Areas of responsibility had to be defined independently. This is territory which Stevenson explores in his essays, in stories, and in his novels. If his work contains a single overall message, which can be found lurking in *Treasure Island*, in *Prince Otto*, in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, in many of his poems and most acutely in the work of the last five years of his life, it is this. It is a message about individual moral responsibility.<sup>54</sup>

Her reading certainly seems to be supported by this short story, for while Gordon's 'blind adherence' to an abstract and binary moral system proves a dangerous denial of human responsibility, Charles acknowledges that it is the price the individual pays for freedom. It is, however, a responsibility which he gladly accepts, for while he begins his narrative with the intention of indulging his pride and greed in a search for the treasures of the *Espirito Santo* he chooses to learn from his uncle's errors and recognise that such a path is morally dubious. To do so is to accept a philosophy of 'travelling hopefully', of the social responsibility involved in living in the labyrinth, and to embrace the freedom which accompanies it. The alternative for Gordon

Darnaway at least, is a dangerously illusionary El Dorado.

Such a debate is also the subject of what is perhaps the the most famous of all Stevenson's fictions *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde*.<sup>55</sup> Curious though such a connection between religion and literature may seem to the contemporary reader, such was the impact of Stevenson's gothic tale at the time of writing that it was immediately used as the subject of church sermons outlining the dangers of courting evil. Such a reading of the novel has persisted, for Jenni Calder, commenting on the novel, reads it in terms of a study of the powers of darkness:

Stevenson explores a situation in which there is no doubt that evil is at least potentially more powerful than good, and is suggesting that if it is allowed to break out, to come into the open, it will inevitably conquer. Not only that, he is saying that 'good' is restriction, and 'evil' is freedom, that 'good' forces human beings to deny certain urges that when liberated burst out uncontrollably. Yet in order to come to terms with evil it must be identified and understood.<sup>56</sup>

An alternative reading of the novel is however possible. Rather than showing the dangers of courting evil, Stevenson here arguably explores the dangers of constructing the self in absolute and binary terms, even if they are terms of essential goodness. Henry Jekyll's 'sin', is, like that of Gordon Darnaway, an attempt to see himself only in absolute terms, and a failure to accept the 'mingled tissue' of his own nature.

It has, of course, been accepted in recent years that *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* offers a more complex dialectic than that between good and evil. Jekyll is not construed in terms of goodness alone, but embodies an elision of both good and evil within himself, in opposition to the 'non-human' Hyde who alone may be interpreted in absolute terms. It is such totality of character which renders Hyde inhuman, for all other characters in the novel are described in terms of both good and bad qualities. Utterson, for example, perhaps the most respectable character to emerge in the narrative, is described as a man of mixed nature, containing an elision of moral



categories within himself:

Mr Utterson the lawyer was a man of a rugged countenance, that was never lighted by a smile; cold, scanty and embarrassed in discourse; backward in sentiment; lean, long, dusty, dreary, and yet somehow loveable.(p.3)

Similar characteristics are attributed to Dr Lanyon. He too is described as a man of mixed character, both 'red-faced' and 'white-haired', both 'genial' and 'boisterous'. Hyde, on the contrary, is described as entirely evil. Slotting unproblematically into a binary model, he alone is 'really like Satan', and in Utterson's perception at least almost the embodiment of evil:

Mr Hyde was pale and dwarfish, he gave an impression of deformity without any nameable malformation, he had a displeasing smile, he had borne himself to the lawyer with a sort of murderous mixture of timidity and boldness, and he spoke with a husky, whispering, and somewhat broken voice; all these were points against him; but not all of these together could explain the hitherto unknown disgust, loathing, and fear with which Mr Utterson regarded him. 'There must be something else,' said the perplexed gentleman. 'There is something more, if I could find a name for it. God bless me, the man seems hardly human! Something troglodytic, shall we say? or can it be the old story of Dr Fell? or is it the mere radiance of a foul soul that thus transpires through, and transfigures, its clay continent? The last, I think; for, O my poor old Harry Jekyll, if ever I read Satan's signature upon a face, it is on that of your new friend!'(p.17)

Yet, this creature who bears the signature of Satan is called into being less by a courting of evil than by the inability of Henry Jekyll to accept that he is anything other than absolutely good; by his incapacity to accept the multiplistic nature of his own character, and to live happily with it. While Utterson and Lanyon may be creatures of elision, they accept themselves as such, recognising that it is the responsibility of the individual to work out his own moral code or 'game-rules' within this ambiguous landscape. Utterson, consequently, 'was austere with himself; drank gin when he was alone to mortify a taste for vintages; and though he enjoyed the theatre, had not crossed the doors of one for twenty years'(p.3). Jekyll, on the other hand, negates such free will, and cannot tolerate the 'mingled tissue' of his own nature, or the

slippage between good and evil which it personifies:

It was thus rather the exacting nature of my aspirations, than any particular degradation in my faults, that made me what I was, and, with even a deeper trench than in the majority of men, severed in me those principles of good and ill which divide and compound man's dual nature.(p.65)

Perceiving the mingled tissue of his own self as 'incongruous fagots' bound together as 'the curse of mankind', Jekyll cannot accept the ambiguous nature of his own character, nor the freedom and responsibility to create one's own codes that accompanies it. Like Derrida he sees such a situation as tragic, perceiving in it the 'terrifying form of monstrosity'.<sup>57</sup>

Incapable of accepting the self in ambiguous terms, then, Jekyll seeks to separate it into its component parts, thus ridding himself of his 'evil' sentiments, his *différance*, forever. The results are disastrous, for ironically it is his intolerance of this multifaceted aspect of personality which calls into being the powers of evil, unleashing Hyde in such a 'form of monstrosity'. With the diminishing of responsibility such a separation entails, free will also inevitably, and correspondingly, perishes and Jekyll finds himself increasingly incapable of controlling his own destiny. While he may believe himself at last good beyond the bounds of ordinary humanity, it is at the price of human freedom, and with a contingent rising of the forces of darkness:

After all, I reflected, I was like my neighbours; and then I smiled, comparing myself with other men, comparing my active goodwill with the lazy cruelty of their neglect. And at the very moment of that vain-glorious thought a qualm came over me, a horrid nausea and the most deadly shuddering. These passed away, and left me faint; and then, as in its turn the faintness subsided, I began to be aware of a change in the temper of my thoughts, a greater boldness, a contempt of danger, a solution of the bonds of obligation. I looked down; my clothes hung formlessly on my shrunken limbs; the hand that lay on my knee was corded and hairy. I was once more Edward Hyde.(p.79)

The cost of a 'nostalgia for the whole and the one', writes Lyotard, is terror.<sup>58</sup> For Jekyll the price for 'the solution of the bonds of obligation' and responsibility is,

similarly, the loss of freedom and, finally, personal destruction at the hands of evil.

The alternative, as Wittgenstein defines it, is explained by Henry Staten:

Because Wittgenstein sees no transcendent form in ordering activities he can argue that it would *always be possible to deviate* from the 'normal' sequence and yet for the deviation to be 'following a rule'...On Wittgenstein's account it is as though an activity were inhabited by a multiplicity of souls, and any one of them could at any stage take over and guide the sequence in its own direction.<sup>59</sup>

But for Henry Jekyll, this recognition that 'man is not truly one, but truly two', or perhaps even 'a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens' comes too late, and perhaps never sufficiently does he understand that man must accept the presence of these paradoxes within himself(p.66)

Similar questions are also explored in what is perhaps one of the finest of Stevenson's pieces of fiction *The Master of Ballantrae*.<sup>60</sup> Like *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, this novel is an exploration of the dangers of expressing human character in absolutist terms and in those of binary opposition. *The Master of Ballantrae* is in fact a novel in which binary oppositions and polarising epistemes are not only challenged but continually deconstructed, among them the romantic notions surrounding the Jacobite rebellion and the common oppositions which are recognised as defining it. While the rebellion is commonly regarded as one surrounded by high feeling and strong political conviction, Stevenson offers what is perhaps a more realistic analysis, suggesting that many families acted more from expediency than commitment:

It took the three a whole day's disputation before they agreed to steer a middle course, one son going forth to strike a blow for King James, my lord and the other staying at home to keep in favour with King George. Doubtless this was my lord's decision; and, as it is well known, it was the part played by many considerable families.(p.6)

Such a 'middle course' inevitably breaks down the harsh binary oppositions between Jacobitism and Loyalism, suggesting that sharp distinctions between them may be misleading. The reality of the Scottish situation may, rather, have been one of

elision, with a slippage between Jacobite and Loyalist sentiments providing a more authentic account of feelings.

A binary framework is thus discredited as a model for describing Scottish experience. Yet it is within a similarly polarised system that the two brothers - James and Henry Durie - position themselves in *The Master of Ballantrae*. To do so is very much in keeping with their characters, for both are of inflexible natures. Henry, contemplating his role should the Jacobite rebellion fail, protests that he could not endure the ambivalent position he would find himself in:

'I play at no such game', cries Mr Henry. 'I shall be left in such a situation as no man of sense and honour could endure. I shall be neither fish nor flesh!', he cried.(p.7)

Both devoted to a 'love of honour' the brothers are determined to be aligned with the winning side. As a result, they can reach no decision as to what they should do in the Jacobite rebellion, and, consequently, resign fate to the toss of a coin. By so doing, they abandon both free will and moral responsibility, entering into a polarised and destructive moral landscape. Mackellar elaborates:

Thereupon he would shake his head at me. 'Ah! Mackellar, you might live a thousand years and never understand my nature', he would say. 'This battle is now committed, the hour of reflection quite past, the hour of mercy not yet come. It began between us when we span a coin in the hall of Durrisdeer, now twenty years ago; we have had our ups and downs, but neither of us dreamed of giving in; and as for me, when my gloire is cast, life and honour go with it.'(p.196)

Within such a terrain it is clear that the forces of evil may flourish. While to Mackellar the resulting opposition may be an essential and just one - "'Your brother is a good man, and you are a bad one - neither more nor less'", he tells the Master - it is clear that a more tragic topography is at play(p.197). Within the human dimension, such a system can bring about no 'divine comedy', but only the onset of evil as each brother seeks to silence and destroy what they perceive as their adversary. By the end of the novel, consequently, Henry - once positioned in the role of martyr - has become as bitter and

destructive as his brother. Convinced as he is that the world is 'banded against him', he becomes 'driven by hatred' in his attempt to defeat the Master:

Here was his mistress: it was hatred and not love that gave him healthful colours. Some moralists might have been relieved by the discovery; I confess that I was dismayed. I found this situation of two brethren not only odious in itself, but big with the possibilities of further evil.(p.207)

By abandoning themselves to the toss of a coin - thus rejecting moral responsibility - James and Henry have entered a terrain of moral antithesis. As a result, within this 'winter's tale' there can be no rejuvenation but only destruction.<sup>61</sup> The novel ends, fittingly, in the American wilderness - a land of chaos where both must perish. Their double death confirms that in the fruitless and rigid terrain which James and Henry choose to inhabit, there can be no moral victory.

Construction of the self in terms of absolute standards, and within the binary oppositions which must support such systems is in *The Master of Ballantrae*, shown to be a dangerous course of action, and one which, if followed to its logical conclusions, will inevitably prove disastrous. Such binary grammars have, similarly, been discredited in the postmodern period, for they rest on a false notion of language as an oppositional rather than a differential medium. Similarly, Stevenson is anxious to suggest that such constructions are themselves far from inevitable and absolute, but on the contrary constantly clash against the 'realities' of lived experience, and our experience of reading the novel. Throughout the narrative therefore he provides reflexive elements which push against this simplistic method of categorisation.

This deconstruction of oppositional frameworks is suggested by the fact that the polarisation which develops between the two brothers is not something inherent from the outset. On the contrary, it is a situation which develops as the novel progresses. At the beginning of the novel the opposition is evidently less extreme. In the account that Mackellar offers of their lives before his meeting with them, and before the Master departs for the Jacobite rebellion, the brothers are described in terms of an elision of good and bad qualities, neither appearing as dreadful as they are later to become. Here,

for example, even in Mackellar's description, James is described in terms somewhat at odds with his later demonic construction:

The face of his behaviour was merely popular and wild: he sat late at wine, later at the cards; had the name in the country of 'an unco man for the lasses'; and was ever in the front of broils. But for all he was the first to go in, yet it was observed he was invariably the best to come off; and his partners in mischief were usually alone to pay the piper. This luck or dexterity got him several ill-wishers, but with the rest of the country enhanced his reputation; so that great things were looked for in his future, when he should have gained more gravity.(p.4/5)

Henry likewise, in this early stage, is not described as the almost saint like figure with which we are later presented. On the contrary, even Mackellar describes him in terms of slippage as 'neither very bad, nor yet very able, but an honest, solid sort of lad, like many of his neighbours'(p.5).

The increased polarisation of the brothers, as we have seen, is set in motion once they abandon free will and the responsibility which accompanies it. Having done so, they set themselves on a course where choice is apparently lost forever. In fact, the positions they adopt are of course neither inevitable nor unquestionable ones, and the opposition which Mackellar seems to see as so simple a one between good and evil, is not one which goes unchallenged. Not surprisingly, it is an interpretation challenged by the Master of Ballantrae himself, who protests against Mackellar's claim that he would have been a bad man whatever the situation. People, he suggests, cannot be so easily defined and constructed, for the distinctions between himself and his brother may not be as absolute as they appear:

'Life is a singular thing' said he, 'and mankind a very singular people. You suppose yourself to love my brother. I assure you, it is merely custom. Interrogate your memory; and when you first came to Durrisdeer, you will find you considered him a dull, ordinary youth. He is as dull and ordinary now, though not so young. Had you instead fallen in with me, you would today be as strong upon my side.'(p.195)

Certainly, the Master's claim is supported by the loyalty he commands in others, as



Secundra's devotion readily confirms. More importantly, James's claim offers an unsettling disruption to the neat pattern of binary opposition which Mackellar has outlined between the two brothers, suggesting that may not be at all adequate. As the conversation takes place aboard the ship as it travels to America, he weaves continually around Mackellar, offering an alternative and disruptive contribution to Mackellar's world system.

Challenge to this binary episteme is also offered by the narrative method of the novel. While events appear to fall into a simple binary system they are narrated to us through Ephraim Mackellar and within the framework of his own naive perception of human experience. Like the Editor in James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, Mackellar claims to offer his account with the authority of history.<sup>62</sup> Like Hogg's Editor too, he presents his text with exacting seriousness, as 'a debt I owe to my Lord's memory'(p.3). Similarly, he claims epistemological authority for his text, stating, 'there does not live one so able as myself to make these matters plain, or so desirous to narrate them faithfully'(p.3). His authority, however, rests on the claim of essential detail, for he recounts details of his story almost to the point of tedium, determined to achieve authenticity by recording what he construes as 'fact' and drawing a sharp distinction with the more dubious material which he cannot authenticate through his own experience. Mackellar's faith is, as a result, in the account of 'authentic history', and like a 'witness in a court', he is certain this is a claim he can make for his own interpretation of the events which have taken place, and for his own narrative.

Such a naive faith in one's own impartial interpretation, and in the nature of the resulting narrative, is one which Stevenson, not surprisingly, unsettles in the course of the novel, for he reflexively suggests that "old squaretoes" interpretations may be both naive, and in themselves a dangerous distortion of events. In spite of his claims for impartiality, it is clear from the outset that Mackellar's narrative is not an unbiased one, or the 'simple truth', but on the contrary, an interpretation or discourse of that 'reality' loaded with devotion to his 'lord' Henry Durie. Indeed, he reminds us

himself that he 'was too much a partisan of Mr Henry's to be anything but wroth at his exclusion', and his devotion to Henry Durie is, if touching in its loyalty, blinkering both to an understanding of his lord's failings and to the greater complexities of the situation. Ephraim Mackellar is a man who can only perceive the world simplistically, and in terms of naive distinctions; an 'old maid', as Alison Graeme is to describe him.

Such a grammar with which to interpret experience inevitably distorts Mackellar's narrative, leading him to repeatedly close off and silence disruptive lines of interpretation or alternative opinion. While Stevenson may claim in 'Crabbed Age and Youth' that there is 'nothing so evident in life as that there are two sides to a question', this is a position which Mackellar, on the contrary, seems determined to deny. And so, while he may include extracts from Burke's Memoirs, or accounts offered by Mountain the explorer, these are in each case dismissed or relativised in some way in an attempt to reinforce the centrality of his own narration, and his own interpretation of the events which have taken place. A footnote, for example, to the Chevalier's Memoirs, comments, 'A complete blunder: there was at this date no word of the marriage: see above in my own narration,' thus silencing Burke's account in the attempt to give his own interpretation complete and totalising authority(p.65).

Such an attempt is, likewise, evident in Mackellar's attempt to fix the end of the narrative within a rigid interpretation of events. The epitaphs which he provides for James and Henry, like his understanding of them during their lives, construct the brothers in terms of binary opposition. While in any real sense their deaths have negated for ever such distinctions, for Mackellar they embrace a moral topography or episteme which continues beyond the grave. Though the course of events has shown that with such a framework in place there can be no moral victor, Mackellar's epitaphs offer an attempt to resurrect such naive distinctions by continuing to portray his lord in the most favourable light. Rather than learning a lesson from the fate of the brothers, Mackellar chooses to perpetuate the world model which has led to their demise. As such his narrative must be called into question, for its continuing

persistence in perceiving the world in absolute and binary terms and its refusal to give voice to alternative perspectives condemns it as what Stevenson describes as an 'immoral narrative'. Mackellar's own position thus serves to undermine the status of his binary interpretation of events, for it is clear that the ideas which he holds are ones discredited by Stevenson both in his narratives and in his critical writing.

*The Master of Ballantrae* thus emerges as a complex work of fiction, but in it, Stevenson remains concerned with the issues which have interested him from *Treasure Island* onwards. Throughout, his interest lies in the inadequacy of absolute and abstract grammars for dealing with lived experience and the dangers of construing the world in terms of the binary oppositions necessary to support such totalising systems. Such thematic concerns themselves launch a challenge to any totalising model of the world in his fiction, but as the *Master of Ballantrae* indicates this is also a model which Stevenson strives to disrupt in the narratological and structural strategies adopted in his work.

While Ephraim Mackellar's narrative may be immoral in that it posits an essential model of reality and refuses to acknowledge alternative forms of truth, it is clear that one of Stevenson's main aims as a writer of fiction was to discover a form of writing which might deconstruct this totalising impulse, acknowledging within itself a more flexible and evasive model of world experience. The manner in which this was to be achieved was itself the subject of much of Stevenson's critical writing, and in particular that generated by his exchanges with Henry James. The solutions he reached were found in a concept of writing which embraces the concept of 'travelling hopefully', constructing an inner reflexivity as it were by incorporating within itself a variety of stances and techniques, of *discourses*, which work to deconstruct the search for presence within writing and offer a more ambiguous and multiplistic fictional grammar.

One of the most fundamental consequences of this desire to resist presence is embodied in Stevenson's distrust of straightforward realism. In 'The Morality of the Profession of Letters', he outlines his distrust of such an absolutist style, suggesting

that its danger lies in its refusal to acknowledge its own biased position. In 'A Note on Realism' published in 1883, he also explores this argument suggesting that a realistic mode is itself only a choice of style, with no higher claim to represent reality than any other technique. What he describes as a 'photographic style' provides no greater access to truth than any other:

All representative art, which can be said to live, is both realistic and ideal; and the realism about which we quarrel is a matter purely of externals.<sup>63</sup>

Much later, Roland Barthes was to reach similar conclusions in his essay *Writing Degree Zero*, of course, where he also suggests that realism may be one of the most dissembling of forms. 'No mode of writing was more artificial than that which set out to give the most accurate description of Nature', he writes, arguing that realism is itself a choice of mode. Such concepts challenge the Enlightenment desire for a plain and empirical style and the claims which it makes for providing access to a more fundamental 'truth', recognising that such an empirical approach is itself misleading, papering over all slippages and dislocations within itself to suggest that what it presents is somehow 'true'. This challenge is at the heart of Stevenson's now famous exchange with Henry James on the subject of the nature of representation.<sup>64</sup>

James and Stevenson first met at Bournemouth in 1885, and their friendship, although kept alive only by correspondence after Stevenson finally left Britain, was to survive until Stevenson's death. The origins of their association however were in critical debate, begun by James's article 'The Art of Fiction' which appeared in *Longman's Magazine* in September 1884. Responding to an argument proposed by Walter Besant, James outlines a view of the novel as imitative and empirical. Its role, he argues, like that of history, is in 'looking for the truth', and its position is of an equal status to that of life:

The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it *does* compete with life. When it ceases to compete as the canvas of the painter competes, it will have arrived at a very strange pass.<sup>65</sup>

While, to be fair, James's conception of the novel is far less naive than it may seem here, his basic understanding of the form emerges as one of essentialist mimesis. The problem for the novelist, consequently, becomes not one of how he may escape presenting in language a necessarily totalising view of the world, but, on the contrary, how the world as a fixed and total entity may be best expressed through language.

It is hardly surprising that the Stevenson who we have seen challenge any fixed and final notion of experience in his fiction, and indeed explore the ways in which the evasive nature of that experience may be only partially recreated through language, should have responded to such suggestions. He was to do so in the form of 'A Humble Remonstrance' published in *Longman's* later that year.<sup>66</sup> In 'A Humble Remonstrance', Stevenson immediately displays a sophisticated grasp of the issues with which he is dealing by defining it not as the art of *fiction*, but more specifically as the art of narrative.<sup>67</sup> To do so is itself to imply an alternative understanding of the novel, for 'narrative' as a term identifies story-telling with the linguistic forms through which it is mediated. Moreover, Stevenson breaks down James's binary analogy between story and history by suggesting that both are themselves forms of narrative, or discourse, governed not by the truth of the facts they contain, but by linguistic play, or as Stevenson defines it 'technical manoeuvres'.

The novel cannot, in this context, Stevenson concludes, 'compete with life', for such a task would be impossible, one for 'a Hercules in a dress coat'.<sup>68</sup> The role of narrative, for Stevenson, cannot be one of providing a 'true' representation, but only of offering a typical or ideal one:

No art is true in this sense: none can 'compete with life': not even history, built indeed of indisputable facts, but these facts robbed of their vivacity and sting; so that even when we read of the sack of a city or the fall of an empire, we are surprised, and justly commend the author's talent, if our pulse be quickened. And mark, for a last differentia, that this quickening of the pulse is, in almost every case, purely agreeable; that these phantom reproductions of experience, even at their most acute, convey decided pleasure; while experience itself, in the cockpit of life, can torture and slay.<sup>69</sup>

The novel, Stevenson suggests, cannot capture the essence of life for narrative robs

real experience of the diversity and colour with which it is enveloped; robs it, indeed, of emotion, and instills in it a rationality and totalising impulse which is only a shadow of the diversity of lived experience.

Stevenson's distrust of the capacity of realism to encapsulate the myriad nature of lived experience is closely connected with a fundamental scepticism about the empirical nature of language. Language for Stevenson, as Alex Clunas suggests, is reflexive rather than descriptive, a tool which creates experience as much as it describes it. For Stevenson, the basis of this distinction lies in an understanding that while experience is multifaceted, ambiguous and labyrinthian, language is by definition precise, linear, and totalising. Experience, and our descriptions of it, are therefore at odds, held in a tension where one constantly clashes with the other. It is, he suggests in his essay on Walt Whitman, this aspect of language which makes it inadequate, for while experience is pluralistic, language, inevitably, tends to settle on one interpretation:

Language is but a poor bull's-eye lantern wherewith to show off the vast cathedral of the world; and yet a particular thing once said in words is so definite and memorable, that it makes us forget the absence of the many which remain unexpressed; like a bright window in a distant view, which dazzles and confuses our sight of its surroundings. There are not words enough in all Shakespeare to express the merest fraction of a man's experience in an hour.<sup>70</sup>

The formal problem for a novelist, then, becomes not one of capturing the totality of lived experience, for such a task is impossible within the inadequate medium of language, but of how, within this context, to create the type of moral fiction which will remind us, as we read, of 'the absence of the many which remain unexpressed', the 'multiplicity of souls' which 'inhabit' every discourse.

Such is, of course, also the task of writers like Derrida and Helene Cixous, who seek to incorporate within their writing an expression of its capacity to constantly exclude aspects of experience. For them, as for Stevenson, a 'moral fiction', is one which embodies within itself a process of deconstruction: a discourse which acknowledges within itself its own partiality, and the slippage and *differance* with



which it is constituted. For Stevenson as for these writers and the postmoderns who write in the shadow of the philosophical climate which they have produced, this may be achieved by a variety of structural strategies.

In Stevenson's early work such a 'moral' fiction is produced by the use of the romance form, for it is, he claims, a medium which pushes against the fixed nature of empirical narrative. Romance, Roman Jakobson points out, is a metaphoric mode - one which, by the relationship of similarity rather than contiguity which it establishes between text and meaning, implies a non-specific and hence ambiguous relationship between the two.<sup>71</sup> Such a relationship sets up a tension between narrative and the inevitable totalising impulse of language. Similar reasons lie behind Stevenson's choice of the romance mode. While realism, he suggests, may claim to give access to a fixed and empirical concept of truth, romance succeeds in at least suggesting, if not capturing, the multiplistic and ambiguous aspects of human experience, thus subverting the concept of absolutism, and capturing within itself the process of slippage by which language in fact operates:

The artistic result of a romance, what is left upon the memory by any really powerful and artistic novel, is something so complicated and refined that it is difficult to put a name upon it; and yet something as simple as nature. These two propositions may seem mutually destructive, but they are so only in appearance. The fact is that art is working far ahead of language as well as of science, realising for us, by all manner of suggestions and exaggerations, effects for which as yet we have no direct name; nay, for which we may never perhaps have a direct name, for the reason that these effects do not enter very largely into the necessities of life. Hence alone is that suspicion of vagueness that often hangs about the purpose of a romance; it is clear enough to us in thought; but we are not used to consider anything clear until we are able to formulate it in words, and analytical language has not been sufficiently shaped to that end.<sup>72</sup>

What romance captures for Stevenson, then, is the irreducible 'something' denied by the totalising impulse of analytical language; the slippage or *trace of différance* which Derrida claims has been denied by conventional discourse. It thus, for Stevenson, approaches the ambiguous aspects of human experience denied by empiricism and

systems of thought based on straightforward binary oppositions.

It is not surprising therefore that a romance form should have been that chosen by Stevenson for his early fictions. It is likewise no coincidence that his chosen genre should have been that of schoolboy stories where the form was more readily accepted.<sup>73</sup> While *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* may, therefore, subvert certain totalising elements of the traditional romance form it is clear that the mode in which they are written is nevertheless recognisably a metaphoric one. The quest form, while unsettled, remains part of their deep structure, allowing identifiable typographical elements such as the hunt for treasure, the presence of physical and emotional obstacles, and the possibility of reconciliation to form part of their environments, their grammars. These early fictions also announce themselves as being in the romance mode by virtue of the fact that they remove the reader from the world of every-day experience. The language in which they are written - note the high style at both the opening and the conclusion of *Treasure Island* - is recognisably that of adventure, adopting the typological forms of romance and epic and swiftly alerting the reader to the mode by which the text is operating. Finding him or herself in a world of pirates, treasure, wicked uncles and inheritances, the reader is alerted to the fact that the text is, to again use Jakobson's distinction, metaphoric rather than strictly mimetic, accepted as imprecise and ambiguous and capturing the indescribably elusive aspects of human experience normally excluded by language and the metonymic form of realism.

Use of the romance mode is, however, only one way in which the writer may challenge the reductive and absolute nature of language and totalising narratives. It is also perhaps, a naive method of doing so, and it is not surprising that as Stevenson's work matured he in part abandoned it, looking for more sophisticated methods by which to deconstruct the absolutist 'threat' of his fictions and the totalising effects of a mode created by language. Among these is the practice of leaving his texts unresolved and open-ended, a technique which in itself serves to render narrative less 'fixed' than in the traditional novel, and by implication more ambiguous.

The practice of leaving texts open-ended or pointedly non-conclusive, widely used

by Stevenson throughout his fictions, is, of course, a feature widely exploited not only by postmodern writers of fiction, but also by both Scott and Hogg and is a concept clearly appropriate for a philosophy of 'travelling hopefully'. As a strategy it 'diffuses' the narrative; rather than leading the reader towards a point of rest or resolution it constantly defers such arrival, taking him only towards a further stage in the continually fluctuating journey of experience.

Such strategies are, as we have in part already noted, implicit in even the earliest examples of Stevenson's fiction. As much is, in fact, implied by the refusal of both *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* to conform entirely to the romance genre, while implying that the quests upon which their 'heroes' have been engaged do not bring fulfilment or, indeed, final resolution. In fact these early journeys in Stevenson's fiction create more tensions than they can in the end accommodate<sup>m</sup>, taking their first person narrators not from moral uncertainty to confident maturity, but from a world of absolute and hence misleading certainty to one where such fixed categories begin to disintegrate. Rather than taking us towards traditional narrative resolution and certainty *Treasure Island* takes us towards ambiguity and hesitance, where the vocabulary is one of supposition. Taken on a journey from moral certainty to relativity, rather than vice versa, Hawkins can only 'suppose' and 'daresay', undercutting his assumptions at every step with linguistic uncertainty, and with a sense of the inadequacy of his own narrative to arrive at a fixed moral destination:

Of Silver we have heard no more. That formidable seafaring man with one leg has at last gone clean out of my life; but I daresay he met his old negress, and perhaps still lives in comfort with her and Captain Flint, it is to be hoped so, I suppose, for his chances of comfort in another world are very small.(p.227)

Such a lack of resolution is of course found also at the end of *Kidnapped*. While the open-ended nature of this novel owes much to the fact that it was to have a sequel, it is important to note that Stevenson took six years to write one and seemed content in the intervening period to let the first part of David Balfour's adventures stand alone.

Likewise the fact that the novels are almost always read independently suggests that consumers of Stevenson's fiction are equally at ease with the non-conclusive aspect of the novel. Lack of resolution in *Kidnapped*, it would seem, results not only from practical, but indeed structural motives. Whatever the reasons, however, it is clear that while David may find himself at the ironically named Rest-and-be-Thankful, his relationship with Alan is far from resolved or concluded:

It was coming near noon when I passed in by the West Kirk and the Grassmarket into the streets of the capital. The huge height of the buildings, running up to ten and fifteen storeys, the narrow arched entries that continually vomited passengers, the wares of the merchants in their windows, the hubbub and endless stir, the foul smells and the fine clothes, and a hundred other particulars too small to mention, struck me into a kind of stupor of surprise, so that I let the crowd carry me to and fro; and yet all the time what I was thinking of was Alan at Rest-and-be-Thankful; and all the time (although you would think I would not choose but be delighted with these braws and novelties) there was a cold gnawing in my inside like a remorse for something wrong.(p.250/251)

The source of this 'remorse for something wrong' is, moreover, a difficulty not altogether resolved in *Catriona*. While Stevenson was aware that what the public wanted was 'more of Alan', *The Further Adventures of David Balfour* contains exactly what its title claims, and David's relationship with Alan is not one fully developed.<sup>74</sup> At the conclusion of the novel then we find Alan is still in exile across the water though visiting David 'very late of a dark night', and causing 'strange doings in a good Whig house'; causing, in effect, an unresolved tension for Alan, an unquietened ambiguity or slippage on the face of Scottish society(p.312). Judgement on the events which have occurred in the novel is similarly ambiguous, for David has resolved to 'tell out everything as it befell', and 'real experience' does not fall into neat moral patterns(p.313). 'The life of man upon this world of ours is a funny business', concludes David, 'and people are often very foolish'(p.313). In such a narrative there can then be no final resolution, only an open-ended deferral which posits experience in the gaps between a binary framework of tragedy and comedy - somewhere in the slippage between a conclusion that would leave the angels, as David puts it, either

'weeping or laughing'.

*The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, however, offers an altogether darker world, and one which might appear to demand some sort of resolution or moral conclusion by which the reader is brought back into some kind of security from the strange world which he has entered. This is of course resisted, a fact which caused condemnation of the novel by contemporary criticism.<sup>75</sup> The novel concludes not with resolution, but with a series of unanswered questions. 'Arrival' is further postponed by the fact that while the book has one 'ending' the narrative offers several points of conclusion. The first, Dr Jekyll's own, offers several questions - 'will Hyde die upon the scaffold? or will he find the courage to release himself at the last moment?'(p.85). While these questions may be answered in the narrator's account of Utterson's actions, the narratives which follow Jekyll's own only serve to offer more questions, and ones, moreover, about the nature of conclusion itself. Explanation and resolution are in this second narrative again deferred, this time to Dr Lanyon's account and Jekyll's own statement, suggesting that it is here that 'this mystery was now to be explained'(p.55). The status of these documents, however, one written by a man in a state of shock so severe that it is to cost him his life, the other written by a man who, by all rational explanations, must be completely deranged, suggest that we may never reach the essence of the narrative - the unlocking of the mystery - but only a series of questions which themselves disrupt any straightforward model for interpreting human experience. The final account - Jekyll's own - does not bring us to a fixed destination, but only to yet another site on the journey. Presence, or final meaning is thus never achieved in the text, but repeatedly evaded and postponed by the narrative strategies within it.

The multiple series of narrators in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is indicative of another technique employed by Stevenson in his attempt to challenge the fixed and absolute nature of both narrative and language. Anxious to give voice to the many alternative perspectives which analytical language often leaves unexpressed, Stevenson seeks to push against the absolute nature of discourse by creating in his



texts accounts from several perspectives, or discourses by unreliable narrators whose claim to present a total vision is consequently undermined.

While this is a strategy which Stevenson adopts with increasing sophistication, it is of course one which appears as early as *Treasure Island*. Though the majority of the novel is narrated by the self-confessedly naive, and not altogether reliable, Jim Hawkins, it is interspersed with text provided by Dr Lanyon. Lanyon's narrative, on the face of it, provides information outside the realm of Hawkin's experience, thus echoing the modernist precept that 'truth' cannot be conveyed by one perspective alone, only by several. However, the use of this technique is more complex than this alone would suggest, for such a diversion in the narrative in fact serves no real structural purpose. Hawkins' narrative, we recall, is written retrospectively, and as he has been commissioned for the task by Squire Trelawney and Dr Lanyon himself, there seems no practical reason why they should not have furnished him with this information. The narrative interpolations in *Treasure Island*, consequently, clearly fulfil a more philosophical function, placed in the text in order that the slippage between alternative voices may be heard and to resist through a 'diffractive' use of discourse the totalising nature of language.

This also seems to be the role of multiple narration elsewhere in Stevenson's fiction, for it is a device which he returns to whenever opportunity will allow. Often too, these interpolations, such as 'The Tale of Tod Lapraik' in *Catriona*, offer strange or apparently ex-centric aspects of experience, thus undercutting any impulse towards ontological certainty in the main narrative.<sup>76</sup> A semiotic and ambiguous dimension of human experience is thus allowed to break through into the text, undercutting any simple metonymic method of interpreting it. Certainly this is their role in *The Master of Ballantrae*, for while Ephraim Mackellar may seek to marginalise the accounts of Burke and Mountain the explorer, their presence in the text also serves to undercut his own authority, and the enlightened world view which he proposes.

The semiotic also erupts into *The Master of Ballantrae* in the form of the supernatural material contained within it. Such material - incorporated mainly in the



refusal of The Master to die, in spite of Henry's repeated attempts to kill him - bursts through Mackellar's empiricist account, suggesting a dimension within the narrative which his model cannot contain. Likewise, this ex-centric aspect of the novel serves to undermine Mackellar's binary interpretation of events by resisting the impulse to silence one aspect of his neat equation. Such a solution, adopting the conventional narrative strategy of death, would allow one brother the role of moral victor and place the novel within the simple distinctions of tragedy or comedy. But this impulse is repeatedly evaded, as James's attempts to kill his brother prove fruitless. Death, when it comes, suitably embraces both brothers. And in spite of Mackellar's attempts to contain this twin tragedy within a binary framework by virtue of the inscriptions which he writes for their graves, the material of the novel bursts free of such neat oppositions to suggest a far more ambiguous situation. While Mackellar's own narrative may thus be an 'immoral one', Stevenson provides material which pushes against the boundaries of his naive distinctions and interpretations.

Mackellar's authority is also undermined in other ways. His world view is, clearly, one which the events of the narrative fundamentally challenge, and his moral judgment is called into question by the opinions of others in the novel. A complex tension is, consequently, set up in the narrative, for while we may suspect that Mackellar may not be relied upon as a narrator, we are bound largely within his narrative, from which the very suspicion itself consequently springs. While Stevenson may provide the occasional intervention, such as that given below, in order that our relationship with Mackellar and our perception of him may be locked into some point of stability, it remains problematic:

[Editor's note: Five pages of Mr Mackellar's MS are here omitted. I have gathered from their perusal an impression that Mr Mackellar, in his old age, was rather an exacting servant. Against the seventh Lord Durrisdeer (with whom, at any rate, we have no concern) nothing material is alleged. -RLS](p.147).

This in itself, of course, only serves to create more questions, for we must ask who

this 'RLS' actually is, and where his authority in turn comes from.<sup>77</sup> After all he, like Mackellar, is shutting down alternative perspectives, and keeping silent unspoken voices. Narrative thus becomes in *The Master of Ballantrae* a concept which both creates 'truth' - we cannot escape from Mackellar's narrative - and distorts it. The novelist, it implies, can never escape the totalising and 'untrue' nature of language which ensues, but can, at best, hope to unsettle it, providing a discourse which itself 'travel's hopefully' towards a myriad of possible conclusions.

It is this 'unsettling' which can be described as a 'moral narrative'. This is what is achieved in *The Master of Ballantrae*, for the novel as a whole breaks free from the narrow binary boundaries imposed upon it by its narrator. Both in his choice of material and in his narrating strategies Stevenson implies tensions and elisions existing beneath Mackellar's naive systems, allowing them to break through into the text in order that the totalising impulses of narrative may be resisted.

The desire to allow such ruptures and breaks in the text, and to subvert the totalising nature of language may, as Julia Kristeva suggests, be equated with radical writing.<sup>78</sup> Clearly Stevenson, both in his critical work and in his fictions, displays an awareness of the epistemological issues which provoke such an impulse. Writing from an awareness of the inadequacies of absolute models and binary systems, Stevenson produces fictions which both provide models of human experience as flexible and multiplistic, and which in themselves resist the totalising categories of binary opposition in language. To live within such a flexible episteme, and to produce a literature which reflects it is, for Stevenson, to 'travel hopefully', to be freed from the inadequate models of absolutism. It is a freedom which he celebrates. In an interesting inversion of Derridean rhetoric, it is the alternative to this, not its inherent indeterminacy and embracing of ex-centricity which is finally terrifying, for this alternative 'nostalgia for the whole and the one' is precisely what unleashes the incontrollable, absolute forces of Mr Hyde, and of 'terror'.

Of all three writers under reassessment in this thesis, it is perhaps Stevenson,

writing as he was at the very dawn of deconstruction, who engages most directly with the linguistic and philosophical 'topography' of postmodernism, and writing from such a landscape, creates fictions which best serve to disrupt totalising models familiar to all three, of language, identity and experience.

- 1 Alastair Fowler, 'Parables of Adventure: The Debatable Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson', in *Nineteenth Century Scottish Fiction: Critical Essays* edited by Ian Campbell (Manchester, 1979), pp.105 - 129 (p.106).
- 2 For a good survey of contemporary responses to Stevenson's work, see *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage*, edited by Paul Maixner (London, 1981).
- 3 For a full discussion of the relationship between Henry James and Stevenson see *Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson: A Record of Friendship and Criticism*, edited by Janet Adam Smith (London, 1948).
- 4 David Daiches, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Revaluation* (Glasgow, 1947).  
Daiches is not alone in paying considerable attention to this book. Its attraction lies, perhaps, in a resistance to the non-conclusive nature of many of Stevenson's texts. To those unhappy with this method, the unfinished 'masterpiece' offers the chance to presume that Stevenson might at last have produced a 'satisfactory' conclusion.
- 5 *Robert Louis Stevenson*, edited by Andrew Noble, Critical Studies Series (London, 1983).
- 6 Alasdair Gray, 'The Story of a Recluse', in *Lean Tales*, with James Kelman and Agnes Owens (London, 1985), pp.222 - 246.
- 7 Daniel Balderston, 'Borges's Frame of Reference: The Strange Case of Robert Louis Stevenson' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Princeton University, 1981), p.267.  
Balderston's thesis provides a record of Borges's interest in Stevenson although it fails, perhaps, to engage satisfactorily with Stevenson's texts.
- 8 Alex Clunas, 'R.L. Stevenson: Precursor of the Post-Moderns?', *Cenchrastus*, no. 6 (Autumn 1981), pp.9 - 11.
- 9 Clunas, p.9 /10.
- 10 It is clearly problematic to refer to Stevenson's perception of God while reassessing him in the context of postmodernism, for post-structuralist thinkers such as Derrida argue that such a perception is itself one open to the project of deconstruction. However, for the purposes of this thesis I have argued that the absolute nature of the Calvinist God divorces his categories from those of the 'ontic', thus leaving these writers with a perception of lived experience much in accord with that of post-structuralism. For a more detailed discussion of this point, see Chapter 3.
- 11 R.L. Stevenson, 'El Dorado', *Virginibus Puerisque*, Skerryvore Edition, XXII, pp.95 - 98 (p.98).  
All references to Stevenson's work are, unless otherwise stated, to the Skerryvore Edition, 30 vols (London, 1924-1926). Where the particular text referred to is apparent, page numbers will be given in brackets after quotation.
- 12 R.L. Stevenson, 'Crabbed Age and Youth', *Virginibus Puerisque*, pp.47-60 (p.50)
- 13 'Crabbed Age and Youth', p.5.

- 14 For a more detailed discussion of this point, see Chapter 1.
- 15 Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', in *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (London, 1978), pp.278-293 (p.280).
- 16 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford, 1953), sec.203, p.82.
- 17 'Crabbed Age and Youth', p.60.
- 18 One of the finest of recent biographies is Jenni Calder's, *R.L.S.: A Life Study* (London, 1980).
- 19 R.L. Stevenson, *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes*, Skerryvore Edition, XV, pp.141 - 280 (p.196).
- 20 'Note by Mrs R.L.Stevenson', *An Inland Voyage*, Skerryvore Edition, XV, pp.xiii-xv (p.xiv).
- 21 R.L.Stevenson, 'My First Book: *Treasure Island*', in *Treasure Island*, Skerryvore Edition, II, pp.xvii-xxxvii (p.xxix).
- 22 R.L Stevenson, *Treasure Island*, Skerryvore Edition, II.
- 23 Traditional quest patterns are, of course, never as straight forward as one might imagine. A recognisable quest structure could, however, for the sake of this argument, be found in *Gawain and the Green Knight*. Unlike Hawkins' journey, Gawain's appears to be a totalising one, for its denouement instigates rejuvenation. Jim's, on the other hand, defeats such absolutism, for its completion brings no such fulfilment.
- 24 Support for this argument may be found in Stevenson's short story, 'The Treasure of Franchard', Skerryvore Edition, VII, pp.191 - 261. Although not altogether successful as a short story, 'The Treasure of Franchard' like *Treasure Island*, illustrates the way in which the recovery of buried treasure may fail to bring the satisfaction we traditionally expect from it.
- 25 R.L.Stevenson, *Kidnapped*, Skerryvore Edition, V.
- 26 David Daiches, p. 61.
- 27 Models of moral development in Stevenson's fiction are frequently built into biographical study. Such comment can at times be unfortunate, for the desire to correlate emotional development in Stevenson's work with biographical aspects of his life can at times be misleading. Daiches' study quoted above offers a prime example.
- 28 See Chapter 1.
- 29 Glenda Norquay, 'Moral Absolutism in the Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins and Muriel Spark: Challenges to Realism' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1985), p. 112.  
I will engage more fully with Norquay's thesis later in this chapter.
- 30 For a complete discussion see Chapter 1.
- 31 The technique of retrospective narration employed in the novel clearly makes this problematic. However, the self-irony which consequently pervades the early parts

of the novel serves to promote the multiplistic and ambiguous model of experience which it encapsulates.

- 32 R.L. Stevenson, 'The Persons of the Tale', *Fables*, Skerryvore Edition, VII, pp.297 - 300.
- 33 Again, concepts such as these are problematic within a postmodern framework. Like Muriel Spark, however, as Norquay's comparison of them suggests, Stevenson recognises a sharp distinction between the spiritual world of absolute standards, and a more ambiguous world of lived experience. The latter, consequently, like the world of story, incorporates a multiplistic and flexible model, where absolute standards cannot apply. Such an understanding of the relationship between ontic and ontological clearly has a profound effect upon these writers.
- 34 Alison Cunningham was, of course, Stevenson's nurse, who, we are told, indoctrinated him with the tenets of a rigid Calvinist code.
- 35 Norquay's thesis is one of the finest pieces of criticism yet to appear on Stevenson. I have, however, included at some length a discussion of my unease with several points of its argument for it illustrates the way in which fine criticism may be misled by the desire to find some totalising impulse in his fiction. Norquay assumes a hankering after absolutism in Stevenson's writing which, I believe, is discredited both by his fictions and his critical writings.
- 36 Norquay, 'Abstract'.
- 37 Norquay, p.98.
- 38 It is of, course, naive to propose that postmodernist writers have simply rejected realism. Realism does, on the contrary, survive as an aspect of their work. What is true, however, is that such realism tends to be contextualised, emphasising that it is no longer an embodiment of epistemological or ontological certainty.
- 39 There is of course no such thing as the representative nineteenth century English novel. The type of fiction to which I am here referring is that proposed as ideal by Leavis - George Eliot's *Middlemarch* may be taken as an example.
- 40 To believe as much is to follow Wittgenstein's concept of the world as a place of social contracts. Unlike Derrida, who sees the loss of absolutes as leading to an anarchistic and terrifying 'free play', Wittgenstein proposes that the world may consequently proceed by a socialised and agreed method of interaction. For a full discussion see Chapter 1.
- 41 R.L. Stevenson, *Catriona: A sequel to 'Kidnapped'*, Skerryvore Edition, VI.
- 42 *Kidnapped*, p.139.  
There is an ironic play here on notions of 'right' and 'wrong'. Alan's ideas are clearly very far removed from the criterion upon which David would make such judgements. Nevertheless they contain a sophisticated and demanding truth about the world which David's absolute concepts of truth and morality could not hope to accomodate.
- 43 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power: An Attempted Transvaluation of all Values*, translated by Anthony M.Ludovici, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, edited by Oscar Levy, 18vols (Edinburgh and London, 1909-1910), XV (1910), sec.481, p.12.
- 44 Charles Altieri, 'Wittgenstein on Consciousness and Language: A Challenge to



- 45 It is too this feature of the novels which has consigned them to the realms of children's fiction. While, certainly, these novels make excellent children's reading, it is clear that they contain issues and complexities which render them suitable also for adults.
- 46 R.L. Stevenson, 'The Morality of the Profession of Letters', *Essays in the Art of Writing*, Skerryvore Edition, XXIV, pp.57 - 68.
- 47 R.L.Stevenson, 'Books Which Have Influenced Me', *Essays in the Art of Writing*, pp.69 - 76.
- 48 'Crabbed Age and Youth', p.59.
- 49 I have not included in this chapter discussion of what has often been regarded as the best of Stevenson's fiction, *Weir of Hermiston*. In part this stems from a resistance to write about an unfinished novel, but also arises from the fact that this work has been given repeated consideration elsewhere, often at the expense of that fiction of Stevenson's which we have complete.
- 50 It is notable that all three writers under discussion write at times in this form. It is perhaps worth considering the proposition that literature of the 'peripheries' may be particularly suitable for the short story form. While 'central' fiction, grounded in epistemological certainty and psychological realism may require the broad sweep of the novel in which to put its characters into play, both the forms and themes explored by American and Scottish writers, for example, may be accommodated in the shorter form.
- 51 R.L. Stevenson, 'The Merry Men', Skerryvore Edition, VII, pp.3 - 62.
- 52 James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner; Written by Himself: with a Detail of Curious Traditional Facts and Other Evidence by the Editor* (London, 1969). See Chapter 3.
- 53 The allusion is also to Stevenson's own experiences of the calming of the perilous rocks of the west coast by the lighthouses built by his own family. Having spent a summer helping with the construction of the lighthouse at Eilean Earraid, the setting for the fictional Aros Jay, Stevenson could not have been blind to the advantages such technology brought to the region.  
On a more metaphorical level, the lighthouse is also a traditional image of Christ's forgiveness. Stevenson clearly wishes to emphasise in this story the possibility Christ offers as a path of redemption from inevitable damnation.
- 54 Jenni Calder, 'Stevenson in Perspective', in *Stevenson and Victorian Scotland*, edited by Jenni Calder (Edinburgh, 1981), pp.1 - 10 (p.5).
- 55 R.L. Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Skerryvore Edition, IV, pp.3 - 85.
- 56 Jenni Calder, *R.L.S.: A Life Study*, p.222.
- 57 Derrida, p.293.
- 58 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report On Knowledge*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, *Theory and History of Literature*, 10 (Manchester, 1984), p.81.

- 59 Henry Staten, *Wittgenstein and Derrida* (Oxford, 1985), p.103.
- 60 R.L. Stevenson, *The Master of Ballantrae*, Skerryvore Edition, IX.
- 61 'A Winter's Tale' is the sub-title for *The Master of Ballantrae*, thus reinforcing its tragic dimensions.
- 62 Both 'writers' exhibit an understanding of language as transparent: a factual and empirical medium through which the plain truth may be discovered.
- 63 R.L. Stevenson, 'A Note on Realism', *Essays in the Art of Writing*, pp.77-83 (p.78).  
 Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology*, translated by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (London, 1967), p.56.  
 Similarities between the ideas proposed in this essay and those suggested by Roland Barthes in *Writing Degree Zero* may be readily discerned. See Chapter 1 for a more full discussion of this topic.
- 64 Conveniently, the articles involved in this debate are reprinted by Janet Adam Smith in her study.
- 65 Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction', reprinted in Janet Adam Smith, pp.53 - 85.
- 66 R.L. Stevenson, 'A Humble Remonstrance', reprinted in Janet Adam Smith, pp.86 - 100.
- 67 'A Humble Remonstrance', p.87.
- 68 'A Humble Remonstrance', p.90.
- 69 'A Humble Remonstrance', p.90/91.
- 70 R.L. Stevenson, 'Walt Whitman', *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*, Skerryvore Edition, XXIII, pp.66 - 92 (p.70).
- 71 Roman Jakobson, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague, 1956).
- 72 R.L. Stevenson, 'Victor Hugo's Romances', *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*, pp. 3 - 28 (p.10).
- 73 For examples of use of the romance genre in school boy fiction one need look no further than *Young Folks*, the boy's paper in which *Treasure Island* first was published.
- 74 *The Further Adventures of David Balfour* is the title under which *Catriona* was published in the United States of America.
- 75 For an example of such criticism see 'J.A. Symonds Letter to Stevenson on the "Moral Callousness" of "Jekyll and Hyde"', Maixner, pp.210 - 211.  
 Symonds suggests that the ending would have been finer if 'Dr. Jekyll by a last supreme effort of his lucid self had given Mr. Hyde up to justice'(p.211).
- 76 R.L. Stevenson, *Catriona*, pp. 136 - 146.
- 77 This is a problem also highlighted by the 'Preface' to the *Master of Ballantrae*. While this preface is not always printed, it is present in the Skerryvore Edition and worthy of perusal. In it, Stevenson, adopting a Scott like persona, describes how he, as the 'Editor', has acquired this 'truly mysterious' text, thus casting further

ambiguity over its status. *The Master of Ballantrae*, pp.xxi - xxiv.

78 See Chapter 1, p.23/24 for more information.

## CONCLUSION

In his short story 'The Isle of Voices' Stevenson describes an island where reality exists on several levels.<sup>1</sup> Transported there by magic, Keola discovers a world where different groups inhabit different spatial and temporal dimensions. Such an island clearly challenges both the fixed nature of reality and any total system by which to define it. Experience it suggests, is irreducibly multiplistic, demanding a more ambiguous and flexible framework.

Such themes are, of course, ones to be found not only in the work of Robert Louis Stevenson, but in the fictions of all three writers examined in this thesis. In the work of Scott, Hogg and Stevenson we consistently find a critique of totalising and binary models of thought, and an awareness of the inadequacy and dangers of such 'grammars' for dealing with lived experience. As a result, they resist such frameworks both thematically and structurally, exploring the ways in which experience repeatedly bursts free from those categories. Similarly, they themselves write modes of fiction which resist restriction within such epistemic topography; pushing against its boundaries of totality. These fictional practices are clearly radical, shaking total systems and positing both a world model and a method of fiction which breaks free from such boundaries.

While such fictional practices have not been favoured by traditional critical frameworks, they are clearly ones which can be reassessed and valued within the postmodern context. 'Henceforth it was necessary to begin thinking there was no centre', writes Derrida, opening up a terrain where the search for both 'presence' and final meaning is recognised as redundant.<sup>2</sup> This 'opening' itself launches an attack on totality, recognising the binary and hence delimiting systems upon which it rests as both inadequate and destructive, and arguing that all such systems can themselves be 'totally shaken'.

Such a context is clearly one sympathetic to the radical features which we find in the work of Scott, Hogg and Stevenson, offering as it does a critical vocabulary with which to re-examine the fictional strategies and attitudes which they employ, precisely the sort of fictional strategies that can be seen in operation in 'The Isle of Voices',

apparent even from the first paragraph:

Keola was married with Lehua, daughter of Kalamake, the wise man of Molokai, and he kept his dwelling with the father of his wife. There was no man more cunning than that prophet; he read the stars, he could divine by the bodies of the dead, and by the means of evil creatures: he could go alone in the highest part of the mountain, into the region of the hobgoblins, and there he would lay snares to entrap the spirits of the ancient.(p.248)

Immediately the readers attention is drawn to the mode in which the story is written, and to the formal nature of the language - that 'literary sophistication' which Leavis so disparagingly identifies in Stevenson.<sup>3</sup> The mode is clearly metaphoric, for the tone of the language and its disjunction from that of common usage - 'he kept his dwelling', 'the spirits of the ancient' - announces that we are entering a fictional world and one created through language. Likewise, Stevenson announces a supernatural dimension - 'he could divine by the bodies of the dead' - thus unsettling any purely empirical model of interpretation. By so doing, he suggests a semiotic aspects of experience, allowing it to break through into his narrative. As a result, the opening paragraph of the story unsettles any fixed form of meaning and of interpretation, suggesting a radically ambiguous and flexible framework. By doing so, Stevenson's method of writing captures the slippage and 'trace-*différance*' within language which resists its impulse towards totality.

This resistance to totalising impulses within his own narrative form is a feature which, as has been shown, Stevenson shares with Scott and Hogg. All three writers resist such totality, discovering instead methods by which it may be unsettled. Stevenson's 'literary sophistication' offers one method by which this may be achieved, for it draws attention to the formal constructions of language through which the text is mediated. As a result, the world created by narrative is defined within its own reflexive ontology, thus highlighting its inability to achieve presence or final meaning. While perhaps not so overtly employed as in the work of their postmodern descendents, similarly reflexive 'proto-postmodern' strategies are present also in the work of Scott and Hogg, who employ a number of techniques by which the totality of the narrative is



undermined, and final or fixed meaning evaded.

These fictional practices have, of course, been outlined in detail in the body of the thesis, and it is unnecessary to reiterate them here. Suffice to say that while Scott, Hogg and Stevenson may employ different approaches, many of the strategies which they adopt serve to undercut fixed and epistemologically 'secure' systems. At the end of 'The Isle of Voices' Stevenson offers a typical example. 'The following note to this story was Appended by R.L.S.' we read at the end of the narrative:

Any student of that very unliterary product, the English drama of the early part of the century, will here recognise the name and the root idea of a piece once rendered popular by the redoubtable O.Smith. The root idea is there, and identical, and yet I hope I have made it a new thing. And the fact that the tale has been designed and written for a Polynesian audience may lend it some extraneous interest nearer home.(p.263)

Here, Stevenson gives up complete authority for his narrative. The idea began, he tells us, elsewhere, thus distancing it from himself. Similar methods of evading closure and fixed meaning are employed by each author in this study. All three provide us with unreliable narratives and narrators offering fictions which clearly undermine their own claims for authority. For Scott, this strategy involves adopting curious, ex-centric, narrating personae; for Hogg it is embodied in the conflicting and alternative accounts which compose his *Confessions*; in Stevenson's work it is manifested in a series of multiple and often naive narrators.<sup>4</sup> For all three it offers a useful method of undermining the status of their own narratives, thus creating a 'moral fiction' which itself resists totality.<sup>5</sup> Such fictions are ambiguous, characteristically open-ended and evasive, refusing to fix meaning and interpretation into any final form.

Stevenson's note also points out that he has taken the 'root' of an idea and 'made it a new thing' and again this echoes sentiments found in all three writers. For each, the act of writing is itself a method of making something new - of more or less self-consciously *interpreting* an experience rather than simply recording it. With Nietzsche, all three acknowledge that 'there are no facts, only interpretations', and that language and writing are themselves part of the interpreting process.<sup>6</sup> Such a reflexive

impulse can of course be radically distorting - Hogg's *Confessions* offers manifest evidence - and each writer attempts by a variety of means to undercut and examine this process within his own writing. 'We have paid a high enough price... for the reconciliation of the transparent and communicable experience' writes Lyotard, and likewise Scott, Hogg and Stevenson resist this capacity within language by drawing attention to the ontological tensions within their own texts, highlighting discrepancies within the narratives they create in order to disrupt their status as total systems.<sup>7</sup>

As already noted it is a concern with language and the reflexive nature of it which may be said to constitute the postmodern context. If it can be defined at all, it can be defined as an awareness of the ways in which our experiences - both personal and public - take place within the field of language. 'Essence is in grammar' writes Wittgenstein, suggesting that there is no presence or meaning beyond language to which it can refer.<sup>8</sup> It is this concept which both shapes postmodernity and suggests its radical disjunction with earlier philosophical positions. While this may not be a topic which dominates Stevenson's 'The Isle of Voices', it is undoubtedly a subject which stands in the shadows of it. This is evident in the title, for the multiplistic nature of experience which exists on the island is one created through language. The islanders can hear 'bodiless voices' calling to and fro, reminding them that the ontology which they inhabit is not the only one which exists on the island(p.261). Similarly, in the story Stevenson suggests that it is our use of language which marks out the nature of our experiences. The cannibals who arrive on the island are described as speaking 'a tongue that sounded very different from the tongue of Hawaii' thus suggesting that it is by language that we shape the borders of our own identity(p.258).

Concerns with language are also, of course, ones with which Stevenson deals in his critical essays. Far more overtly engaged with theoretical positions than either Hogg or Scott, he explores the inability of language to capture the multifaceted nature of experience - the slippage between a language governed by polarities. 'Language is but

a poor bull's-eye lantern' for describing the world, he suggests, arguing that while experience is ambiguous and flexible, language is necessarily totalising.<sup>9</sup>

While Stevenson may be the only one of the three writers to reach such a theoretical position, a concern with the way in which language is a problematic medium is also evident in Scott's and Hogg's fiction. For Scott, this is manifested in an interest in nomenclature, and an awareness that the linguistic constructions by which we describe experience shape our perceptions of it, an understanding fundamental to his conceptions of Scottish identity, for it incorporates a recognition that the binary linguistic frameworks by which we commonly define it - Jacobite and Loyalist for example - are inadequate for describing the realities of Scottish experience. A similar awareness of the way in which language may be used to create a distorted model of experience is also the subject of Hogg's *Confessions* for in that novel he explores the ways in which language, if accepted as an empirical medium, can be used to reach the most horrific of conclusions.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, then, an awareness of the inadequacies of language to achieve presence or total meaning is present in the fiction of Scott, Hogg and Stevenson. Likewise, the desire to deal with this position is the impetus behind many of their fictional practices, for their work repeatedly exhibits strategies which seek to suggest that the models they have themselves created in language can only be partial and non-absolute ones. It is the business of post-structuralists, suggests Alan Bass, to 'shake' totalising systems including the ones which they themselves create, and a desire to undermine the absolute nature of their own narratives is likewise manifest in the fictions of Scott, Hogg and Stevenson.<sup>11</sup> As a result, the postmodern context clearly offers a sympathetic framework in which this radical and evasive aspect of their fictions may be re-examined.

Nevertheless, while Scott, Hogg and Stevenson may exhibit in their work an awareness of the inadequacy of language to contain all aspects of experience, this position does not result from a philosophical conclusion, but from their position within

that lived experience itself. For Derrida and Wittgenstein, it is the conclusions they reach concerning the nature of language and meaning which provoke a challenge to totalising systems.<sup>12</sup> For Scott, Hogg and Stevenson it is rather, an appreciation that experience cannot be contained within the post-Enlightenment models and rhetorics of philosophical and binary thought which provokes a literature of 'travelling hopefully'. While a postmodern context may be one sympathetic to the challenge to totalising systems contained in certain nineteenth century Scottish fictions, then, this difference of emphasis marks a disjunction between them. Clearly the work of Scott, Hogg and Stevenson does not exhibit a fully contemporary self-conscious concern with questions of reflexivity. While, without doubt, their work may be read in an illuminating light in the postmodern context, it would be misleading to suggest that their work can consequently be described as 'postmodernist'. Similarly, while the critique of total and binary systems which can be found in their writing, and the fictional practices which reflect it, can be appreciated within a postmodern framework, this critique in their work springs from different impulses than those which typically direct postmodern thinking. For Scott, Hogg and Stevenson, the conclusion that the world does not fit into absolute and binary structures arises from a direct response to the world around them. For post-structuralists it is a recognition brought about by an *abstract* consideration of the nature of language.

Obviously this conclusion demands some consideration of the aspects of that lived experience which may have shaped the alternative perspective and radical fictional practices which we find in nineteenth century Scottish fiction. While it has in part been the policy of this thesis to avoid exploring the 'reasons' for this aspect of the work of Scott, Hogg and Stevenson - such an investigation echoing too closely the 'parlour game' of self-examination which Cairns Craig identifies - it is clear that certain aspects of Scottish lived experience may contribute to the multiplistic and challenging vision which we find in their work.<sup>13</sup>

One such aspect is certainly the nature of religious experience within Scotland. For

both Hogg and Stevenson the absolutist and binary code which Calvinism offers clearly shapes an awareness of its inadequacies for dealing with real experience. Human experience, they suggest, constantly erupts out of this 'damnatory creed',<sup>14</sup> demanding a more flexible and multiplistic framework - one which allows for the 'mingled tissue' of man's nature.<sup>15</sup> For Scott, the polarities of Scottish political history provide a similar reaction, for he suggests that it is an inadequate framework for dealing with the ambiguities of Scottish experience.

A third reason for the critique of totality which we find in the work of Scott, Hogg and Stevenson may, however, lie in the marginalised nature of Scottish experience itself. As already discussed, Julia Kristeva, in her exploration of marginalisation suggests that what has been marginalised may be equated with that which 'shakes totality', for it is a form of writing which the centre cannot tolerate. There may, however, be a more intrinsic link between marginalisation and the radical writing identified in her analysis. Kristeva herself recognises that while it is not exclusive to femininity, for example, there is a greater tendency for it to be manifested in women's writing.<sup>16</sup> Arguably, once a group has been positioned as ex-centric in relation to the central culture, it is inevitably brought up against its own difference to that mythically homogeneous centre. As a consequence, the periphery is rendered acutely aware of the inadequacy of any fixed or total model for interpreting human experience; to be peripheral is thus to be aware of the multiple nature of the world and a lack of ontological certainty within it. It is this alternative perspective which is reflected in the writing of the margins.

This is in fact what Edwin Muir implies when he suggests that Scotland could not produce great writers because it was a society in the process of 'melting and dissolving'.<sup>17</sup> All societies are of course continually in such a state of flux. But while the central culture - with its desire for totality - may silence this ambiguity it is a multiplicity of which the periphery - from its marginalised perspective - is continually aware. This would suggest that along with the nature of Calvinism which we find in Scotland and her stormy political past - both of which reflect a clear elision of binary

categories - Scotland's peripheral and ex-centric position within the union *itself* contributes to the critique of totality which we find in her writers. Certainly, all three of these elements suggest that it is as a response to the lived experience which they find around them that Scott, Hogg and Stevenson provide a set of fictions which challenge such systems.

Charles Altieri suggests that it is precisely because it has been divorced from real experience that the totalising philosophical project with its search for presence has been sustained. 'Abstract philosophy', he argues, 'is speech from the outside, from men who consciously reject a perspective from within ordinary experiences in order to put these experiences in another, more systematic and abstract light'. As a result, philosophy, divorced from ordinary experience, has been able to sustain its search for meaning or the 'transcendental signified' beyond language. Working inductively, as Wittgenstein does, however, such a project becomes impossible to sustain:

Perhaps Wittgenstein's most significant achievement, through his articulation of the idea of justification by description, has been his ability to point out why traditional philosophy so vexes the world. He shows that the ground on which traditional philosophers try to construct their edifices is unstable precisely because they feel the need to alter the rough ground they find and rearrange it into a foundation built upon a desired total interpretation of experience.<sup>18</sup>

Writing himself from the 'rough ground' of experience Wittgenstein finds a way of proceeding within a world where totalising, *a priori* systems cannot apply. To do so brings him into contrast with Derrida, for whom the loss of the 'grand metaphysical absolutes' can only be a terrifying position.

The ground from which Wittgenstein writes is one which he shares with Scott, Hogg and Stevenson. These writers, writing from the 'rough ground' of Scottish lived experience similarly find totalising systems inadequate. Their response is to find a path by which to travel hopefully over such an ambiguous terrain, for the alternative is to silence and destroy vital aspects of experience. Writing from lived experience, then - and in particular from the marginalised context of Scotland - Scott, Hogg and



Stevenson write a fiction at odds with the binary, essentialist abstracts of philosophy. Such a fiction itself shakes totality, suggesting that without absolute systems it is still possible to find a path by which to proceed.

In *Zettel*, Wittgenstein provides a fitting analogy to describe his own position:

If I were sometime to see quite new surroundings from my window instead of the long familiar ones, if things, humans and animals were to behave as they never did before, then I should say something like 'I have gone mad'; but that would merely be an expression of giving up the attempt to know my way about.<sup>19</sup>

The view from the window for Scott, Hogg and Stevenson has always been one which has seemed strange, for it reflects not the ontological certainty and stability promoted by the central culture but one clearly at odds with it. Their fictional response has been an attempt to find their way about within this uncertain framework where the conventional game-rules clearly do not apply. By doing so they produce a fiction of 'travelling hopefully' - a pathway within this strange and multiplistic system challenging the need for a totalising framework. Not surprisingly, such a fiction is one which does not fit comfortably into traditional critical models. It is, however, a fictional practice which may be fully appreciated in the postmodern period.

While Wittgenstein's metaphor may be one which suggests the possibility of proceeding beyond the existence of metaphysical absolutes it cannot, however, be described as positively optimistic. It is, rather, tentative, suggesting that a hesitant response may be the only one available. While the title of this thesis is 'Travelling Hopefully', and the phrase has been taken to describe the fictional positions of Scott, Hogg and Stevenson, it must be admitted that they also provide only a hesitant affirmation of their own solutions to the lack of a totalising framework.<sup>20</sup> Rather, their fictions deal far more with the evils which lurk within such systems - the Mr Hydes and the Gil-Martins - than with the 'pleasures' which Scott maintains may be 'found along the way' of a more open-ended journey. To 'travel hopefully' is perhaps a philosophy which negates the binary distinction between optimism and pessimism

which traditional fiction advocates, for it attempts to describe not an interpretation of our experiences within the world - an abstract philosophy - but simply the world *as it is* - neither optimistic nor pessimistic, but existing within an elision of the two - truly an ambiguous framework. This is certainly what is implied by the protracted conclusion of Scott's *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, and it is a conclusion supported also by Stevenson's fiction which implies that the reward for finding a path across the ambiguous terrain - the 'wanderings'- of lived experience, are simply freedom and integrity, and, more ambiguously, responsibility.<sup>21</sup>

'Travelling hopefully' can then hardly be described as a position of celebration. It is rather, that of the ambivalent freedom of contingency. Yet when that freedom is from figures like Hyde and Gil-Martin - the terror that lies in a 'nostalgia for the whole and the one' - and from a desire for the 'centre' which seeks to silence the peripheral experience, it is clearly to be welcomed.<sup>22</sup> Taken in the spirit of 'travelling hopefully' - as an environment which offers the possibility of reassessment and change - postmodernism is clearly deserving of a consonant welcome to the study of Scottish fiction.

Yet, while postmodernism may provide a context which is particularly valuable for the margins, its boundaries do not stop there. In her essay 'Re-reading the great tradition', Catherine Belsey argues that Leavis's seminal study limits not only those writers banished from its framework, but also those contained within it. Re-assessing George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, Belsey argues that Leavis, by placing the novel within his own unifying framework, produces a reading which is manifestly reductive, limiting the scope of what is in fact a far more complex and ambiguous novel.<sup>23</sup>

Belsey's conclusions are hardly surprising, for criticism is itself a philosophy and one at times divorced from the 'rough ground' of fictional writing. While traditional criticism may find in its chosen writers the unity which it searches for, fictional writing, at its best, continually resists such restrictions to its field of play, positing through its typological use of language a challenge to these containing abstractions.

Totality is, perhaps, a myth of criticism rather than one of literature, and as Belsey's study suggests, the 'great tradition' itself might benefit from reassessment within a postmodern context.

To state as much is of course not to negate this thesis, although the notion of a study which itself side-steps its own conclusions is, for obvious reasons, appealing. While radical writing - a writing which 'shakes the totality' of totalising systems and the binary oppositions upon which they rest - may be an aspect of all fiction, it is clearly an aspect which is self-consciously marked in the fictional practice of Walter Scott, James Hogg and Robert Louis Stevenson. For these writers oppositional grammars are clearly inadequate, and models of both human experience and of writing based on the search for 'presence' consequently deconstructed. In their place they offer a fiction of 'travelling hopefully' - a fiction which in its own themes, strategies and fictional practices resists the myth of essence itself.

The purpose of this thesis was to reassess certain of the *boundaries* of Scottish fiction as they are found in the work of Scott, Hogg and Stevenson. Clearly, by reading it within the topography of postmodernism this may be achieved, for it is a topography itself sympathetic to a critique of totality. It is, likewise, a context which provides the bearings within which such a critique may be both valued and vocalised, - one fitting for a fiction which, in 'travelling hopefully', explores the inadequacy of total systems as interpretive 'maps' for the 'rough ground' of experience, and finds a path by which to travel where such systems are no longer in place.

## Notes to Conclusion

- 1 R. L. Stevenson, 'The Isle of Voices', in *Selected Short Stories of R.L.Stevenson*, edited by Ian Campbell (Edinburgh, 1980), pp.248-264.  
The texts for this collection are taken from the Swanston Edition of Stevenson (1912). I use this here as it includes the end note which is not published in the Skerryvore Edition. Where the text referred to is apparent, page numbers will be given in brackets after quotation.
- 2 Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', in *Writing and Difference*, translated by Alan Bass (London, 1978), pp.278-293 (p.280).
- 3 F.R.Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (London, 1948), p.6.
- 4 James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner : Written by Himself: with a Detail of Curious Traditionary facts and Other Evidence by the Editor* ( London, 1969).
- 5 'Moral fiction' is of course a term coined by Stevenson in his essay 'The Morality of the Profession of Letters' to describe a fiction which refuses to silence the multiplistic nature of experience. *Essays in the Art of Writing*, Skerryvore Edition, XXIV, pp.57-68.
- 6 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power: An Attempted Transvaluation of all Values*, translated by Anthony M. Ludovici, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, edited by Oscar Levy, 18 vols (Edinburgh and London, 1909-1910), XV (1910), sec.481, p.12.
- 7 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, *Theory and History of Literature*, 10 (Manchester, 1984), p.81/82.
- 8 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford, 1953), sec.371, p.116.
- 9 R.L. Stevenson, 'Walt Whitman', *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*, Skerryvore Edition, XXIII, pp.66-92 (p.70).
- 10 For a full discussion see Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis.
- 11 Alan Bass, 'Introduction', *Writing and Difference*, pp.ix-xx (p.xvi).
- 12 For a full discussion see Chapter 1 of this thesis.
- 13 Cairns Craig, 'Peripheries', *Cencrastus*, no.9 (Summer, 1982), pp.3-9 (p.4).
- 14 'Damnatory creed' is a phrase adopted by Stevenson in his short story 'The Merry Men' to describe the more severe face of Calvinism.  
'The Merry men', Skerryvore Edition, VII, pp.3-62 (p.46).
- 15 'The mingled tissue of man's nature' is again a phrase used by Stevenson in his essay 'Books which have Influenced Me', *Essays in the Art of Writing*, Skerryvore Edition, XXIV, pp.69-76 (p.72).

- 16 For a full discussion of Kristeva's approach and its relevance to this thesis see Chapter 1, p.23/24.
- 17 Edwin Muir, *Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer* (Edinburgh, 1936 ), p.173.
- 18 Charles Altieri, 'Wittgenstein on Consciousness and Language: A Challenge to Derridean Literary Theory', *Modern Language Notes*, 91 (December, 1976), pp.1397-1423 (p.1408).
- 19 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, edited by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H.von Wright, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford, 1967), sec.393, p.70.
- 20 A similar attitude may be found in contemporary postmodern fictions.
- 21 Walter Scott, *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, Centenary Edition, VII (1886)
- 22 Lyotard, p.81.
- 23 Catherine Belsey, 'Re-reading the great tradition', in *Re-Reading English*, edited by Peter Widdowson (London, 1982), pp.121-135.

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